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RECOLLECTIONS

OF

FOREIGN TRAVEL,

&c. &c.

VOL. I.

RECOLLECTIONS

OF

FOREIGN TRAVEL,

ON

LIFE, LITERATURE,

AND

Self-knowledge.

By Sir EGERTON BRYDGES, Bart.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

I DO not think a long preface to these letters necessary. Their title will, I trust, be found to announce their contents justly. On every new book the trite question, *cui bono?* may perhaps be fairly asked. I take for granted, that every literary production ought either to inform the understanding, or delight the imagination, or touch the heart. Or, perhaps, there is an inferior sort of merit, which may be just endured; this is the merit of doing no more than merely refreshing the memory.

I may be permitted here to anticipate to the reader an observation or two, which I have made in my closing letter. I have remarked, that three things would make perfection in the matter of a book; that is,

when it is at once *new*, *just*, and *important*. But as Johnson has observed of "great "things," important things "can rarely "have escaped former observation." If not new, then the matter must be at least unborrowed; and not stale. It is the unchastised and unreasonable search for novelty, which is the grand source of all corrupt writing and corrupt taste. It gives a momentary piquancy; which, as it is false and factitious, soon loses its interest; but which, in every country, has always attended a late stage of literature; and always been the prelude of its downfall. At such a period, writers of simplicity, plainness, and good faith, are never popular.

The standard of merit I have here laid down, will scarcely, I trust, be disputed by any rational mind; indeed it approaches to a *truism*. I am willing to be tried, and stand or fall by it; with this proviso, that the judges be persons of strict integrity and conscience, and of cultivated intellects: I will not even bargain for great talents or nice feeling and taste. I protest against

party judges, either political, literary, mercenary, or personal! As to originality, I cannot but know whether I have, or have not borrowed; and on that head, all the denials in the world, civil or rude, will not affect me. As to what is just or true, no one can be sure of himself, because matter of opinion and sentiment cannot be brought to a demonstration; and as long as the faculties and hearts of mankind vary, opinions and sentiments will vary also. Every one who knows mankind, therefore, knows that he cannot hope a general assent; he must look only to those of a native and exercised strength of mind and purity of feeling; and his hope must be built on a general concurrence with the spirit of those departed authors, whose wisdom has been admitted by the sanction of time. So far for what is just.

What is *important*, is in some degree liable to the same uncertainties of opinion, as what is just; but not equally. There are many things which must be admitted to be important by universal consent; such

as many topics in politics, national customs and habits, in morals, and literary criticism. Nor have I any fear that such of *these* topics as are touched in these letters, will in *themselves* be deemed trivial. But the question will turn on the manner in which I have treated them. Though important in themselves, they may be treated lightly, injudiciously, and incorrectly; and thus have the insignificance of trifles. On this last point, I must submit to the decision of sober, sound, and candid criticism; against any other, I will always use all my scorn, all my strength, and every energy of exposure.

There remains the question of *staleness*. It is a word thrown out at random by the ignorant, or the malicious; and I have known it sometimes put forth with oracular impudence, not only where it could not be candidly applied, but where the reverse was singularly prominent. I remember instances of this as to matters of fact, where the rarity or staleness would admit of demonstration. A small selection had been made from a very rare old volume of English

poetry, so rare, that the only copy which had appeared at a sale for many years, sold for twenty or thirty guineas at least. A public critic censured the reprint of what he said was "so stale and common, and so "known to all readers," and advised the resort to more *recondite* sources!!! The critic is long since deceased; but what is worse, he affected to be himself a bibliographer; and had the best *means* of being a very learned one.

It does not appear to me that there can be *staleness* in that which is unborrowed. There is always a freshness of manner, if not novelty of discovery, in that which springs direct from the mind; and, in fact, also there are almost always some tints of novelty given by a new manner and variety of expression. Even Johnson degrades himself by using the vulgar cant of criticism; he says of Gray's Ode on Spring, that "the "morality is natural, but *too stale*." Nothing can be stale which is not familiar to the multitude of readers, both in thought and language. If truth, once promulgated,

was always known and present to the public; there would be little occasion for new books; for then almost every thing that could be said would, in fact, *be stale;* we may probably find in the ancient classical writers a priority of almost every moral axiom, or remark on life, or beautiful sentiment, which can now be produced. But we want confirmation, recognition, new application, by an unprejudiced, self-examining mind.

Artificial intellects may throw out what *hot-bed* fruit they will: it will neither be wholesome, nor have any permanent flavour. There is a frankness, a directness, and earnestness of mind; and a rectitude and force of virtuous sentiment which alone ought to secure, and alone will secure, a lasting value to those works of literature which treat of life, manners, and the human heart. Formal books are but dull impertinences. How many thousands of them has *Montaigne* survived. I have gone on hitherto, and, while my faculties last, I will go on, in defiance of slights, misrepresentations, and

false criticism. The professional members of literature owe me a little more than they have given me. That profession is now become, among its successful authors, a very lucrative occupation. When I secured for them, by a clause which I, by my own sole suggestion and exertion in parliament, got introduced into the *Copyright Act*, the property in their works for the remainder of their lives, if they survived the *twenty-eight* years, I am confident that I added an important pecuniary value to their labours. And now they may abuse me as they will: if they can, by this sacrifice of me, add to the value of what I have thus been the means of already putting into their pockets, let them do so. The public will, of course, pay better for a piquant article of criticism than a candid one. I remember a celebrated authoress, not long since deceased, who survived the date of her earliest publication, at least *sixty-seven* years, and whose works have a regular annual sale to this day. How long must Mrs. *Barbauld* also have survived the date

of her first poems. *Thirty-nine years* * have elapsed since the date of my own earliest publication.

I suspect that long prefaces are rarely read, and therefore I close here; not deprecating criticism; for I am sure that deprecation never yet availed a single author.

Campagne de Watteville, Geneva,
22d September, 1824.

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* See Maty's Review, May, 1785.

ABSTRACT OF THE LETTERS

IN THE FIRST VOLUME.

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at first, but soon sinks. Truth continues buoyant. *Dicta* of genius are invaluable. Genius deals with the heart. They who have not genius may reflect what they cannot create. Chastised hues in imagery the tests of real genius. Imitators caricature. Genius an oracular link between us and the mysteries of nature.

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ERRATA, in Vol. I.

Page 15. line 23. after *is* insert *a*.
17. line 13. after *they* insert *can*.
18. line 8. before *is not* insert *there*.
37. line 15. for *and* read *but*.
44. line 9. for *Falpham* read *Felpham*.
63. line 12. for *week* read *weak*.
66. line 11. for *Maio* read *Mai*.
85. line 22. for *demonstration* read *demonstrative*.
96. line 11. for *Pietets* read *Pictets*.
109. line 5. for *but* read *yet*.
158. line 1. for *dictæ* read *dicta*.

RECOLLECTIONS

OF

FOREIGN TRAVEL, &c.

LETTER I.

15th July, 1824.

For practical purposes, the register of places and events, made on the spot, and at the moment, is, perhaps, the most useful. But it is not so for literature, for refined pleasure, and for general instruction. A landscape-painter who copies from local nature, and a portrait-painter who draws an individual likeness, seldom exhibit any genius. He who delineates from internal fancy, rather than directly from visible objects, gives a more beautiful figure, because fancy rejects many perplexing details and little blemishes: but, the *memory* of *fancy*

improves the picture still more; still more mellows beauties; and still more perfectly dismisses superfluities and deformities. It must be observed here, that I do not (as many metaphysicians do) confound *fancy* and *memory;* of which one is an original faculty, and the other the mere duration of the result or fruit of a faculty.

During a residence of six years on the continent, principally in Switzerland and Italy, I have stored my mind with copious materials of knowledge, reflection, sentiment, and imagery, from which I persuade myself that I can now bring forward sketches and detached memorials which, having had time to mature themselves, to be sobered by distance, to be rendered more exact by comparison, and to be enriched by associations of a wider compass, may take a higher place and more durable character than first impressions recorded at the moment, and with all the temporary adjuncts which accompanied them."

A man on the verge of sixty-two, if he thinks that he has any thing to relate worth

telling, has not a day to lose. Night is coming on; and the morning of another day, as the present passes off, becomes more and more uncertain. If Dr. Johnson's opinion be authority, no man is so obscure, or so stupid, but that he may relate something deserving to be remembered, if he will speak with truth, simplicity and frankness; if he will describe his real feelings and undisguised opinions. Mine, such as the last six years have taught me, shall be laid open with the fearlessness of good faith, in the order in which they may happen to recur to my memory; for I will not attempt to preserve any order; nor do *letters* require it. I undertake no regular narrative of facts; the only order shall be that which the course of my mind shall take on the successive days on which the letters are written.

I have been employed for one-and-forty days in writing *Letters on the Genius and Poetical Character of Lord Byron.* They were finished yesterday; and now I languish for an equally congenial occupation. They

have been the delightful amusement of the first four or five hours of the fresh morning, generally from six to ten; and I never rose to a task with so much continued interest, nor fulfilled one with so much ease. I am not willing to lose this habit of innocent, if not useful, employment of my hours. The powerful effect of habit is notorious; by daily and unbroken exercise, the faculties of distinction and combination and the command of language increase, even at my age; clouds break, perplexities dissolve, chaos falls into order, and new regions are explored and cleared. To me writing is never a fatigue, because my first language serves me; and it comes as quick as my pen can record it. Nay, I have lately tried it by experiments four or five times repeated, and find that I can compose quicker than I can copy the same thing; but that I cannot continue it so many hours.

I look back to my residence on the continent with more pleasure than regret; it has been an important period of my life, though at an age generally thought too late

for improvement, and when health and spirits fail too much to be capable of deep and lively impressions. Mine, I persuade myself, have been both deep and lively. I look back on Italy with an intensity of pleasure and enthusiasm which, while the scenes were *present*, I did not experience; but such is my nature;—it may be its imperfection. I own, that I live, and always did live, more in fancy and imagination than in reality: perhaps it will continue to be my reproach; I know that it has been so thousands and thousands of times in the hard tempestuous life I have had to encounter, where all practical caution and practical firmness seemed requisite, and where I have been often wrecked upon shoals and rocks for want of a microscopic eye, and by gazing upon distant views.

Anecdotes are the rage of the day: indeed they have been, and must from their nature have been, the popular rage of every day. They are so much more easily comprehended than other matter, and require so little talent or education to taste them,

But they do not always convey information of a kind quite as certain as the reader is apt to suppose. A slight ridiculous trait, well related, makes a strong impression; but it is no criterion of one who relies rather on solid qualities than on little proprieties. Besides, the truth in half such anecdotes is sacrificed to a *bon mot*. What signifies if all the petty stories told of the private character of the *Duke of Marlborough* are true? He was not one atom the less a great general! Or, if an anecdote told of Lord ——— when his genius was commended, be true; that he rode badly, spouting out *Metastasio* on the banks of the *Brenta*, when an Italian nobleman passing in his carriage burst out into a loud laugh, which so much offended him, that in his rage he went up to the carriage, and laid his whip heartily about the said noble's shoulders, and then, throwing his card of address into the vehicle, rode off: was Lord ——— less of a poet for this? Yet there are thousands of readers who would prefer such an anecdote to volumes of

criticism. This is the little kind of short tattle with which men of the world amuse themselves in society, which procures them the name of delightful companions. For my part I am a very dull fellow, and have laid up no treasures of this sort of gossip.

My observations on the profounder movements of life and character shall be told ingenuously; for though I have not much occupied my attention with the surface of society, I have always had a great curiosity (if not skill) to obtain a discriminative view of those who have been eminent for genius, talents, or the discharge of an important concern in human affairs; and I have had a near inspection of some men who will fill a place in history or in literature, and, on certain occasions, seen something of the internal movements of public concerns.

An intense love of books from very childhood, and the pursuits for which they engendered a flame in an imaginative mind, made me always a lover of retirement, and of the scenes where it could be most peacefully enjoyed. This was increased by so

extraordinary a degree of native shyness, as to take away all self-possession in society, and to make company often in the highest degree painful and irritating to me. The first eight years of my life, spent entirely in a country mansion, placed secludedly on a wooded hill (though in a populous neighbourhood of gentry), confirmed this timidity of disposition and temper so strongly, that it has never since been conquered, though somewhat abated. For many years, in the early part of my life, it totally took away all power to make any way in the world; and threw me out of the paths of ambition, and even of the opportunity to make common acquaintance. The most precious years of my life were passed in unprofitable and stagnant solitude. I say *stagnant*, because I am convinced that emulation and comparison are necessary for the nutrition of abilities as well as knowledge. From this defect, I soon had the mortification to see, in all directions, "boobies" (to use Dr. Sneyd Davies's expression) "mounting over my head." When I left college in 1783, and

went to the Temple, I had scarce an acquaintance among lawyers, and was incapable of making any. I went down to the courts at Westminster; but at that time the language talked there seemed to me an unintelligible jargon; and so I continued to write *sonnets*, instead of copying pleas, and to solace myself by despising what I could not understand. I read *Blackstone*, whom I *did* seem to myself to comprehend, but who did not at all assist me in affixing any meaning to the arguments I heard in court. What, however, I liked better than all the rest of *Blackstone*, was his *Lawyer's Farewell to his Muse*, which I transcribed into the first blank leaf. Had I spent but three months in a *special pleader's office*, all my difficulties would have vanished of themselves, almost even without a mental effort. The ordinary course of the business of life has taught me these things since, without study or professional aid. And I now persuade myself, too late, that there is no knowledge which I could have more easily mastered than that of the law. When I

was young, I was capable of great labour, and loved it. I did not want amusement or exercise; I did not even like exercise; it fatigued rather than refreshed me; and I could read and write from morning even till midnight. Now I can neither read nor write after the freshness of the morning is over. How deeply I lament that I threw away this capacity of labour, when it would have opened to me a passage through life so beneficial and gratifying, without paying the price of any painful cost.

I was born a younger brother, and continued so till the age of forty-five: my father also remained a younger brother till his age of sixty-eight, and only survived his elder brother seven months; and yet more, the whole branch of my ancestors was of a remote juniority. My grandfather has been dead *one hundred and twelve years*, at the early age of thirty-one years and nine months. My father retired early from college to a country life, and refused to take orders for the family living of the parish where the mansion was situated. I have

spent nearly *forty-four* years since his death in fitful energies, which have led to nothing.

Yet they who have raised themselves to great stations, have neither always been happy, nor left happiness or respectability to their posterity. But still, it will be contended, rank and riches are more substantial than fame; while to all the other evils to which they are subject fame is equally exposed. I have long thought that the main benefit of fame is the intrinsic pleasure that accompanies the exertions to which it gives rise. All the rest, if not hollow, is transient and feeble in its power; and its capriciousness is so provoking, and keeps expectation in such a fever, that, as it is inconsistent with that calmness which forms the staple of happiness, it is not desirable. Yet, if it secures a favourable reception in society, it does not confer the mere advantage of flattering vanity; it produces that self-complacence which the just impulses of our moral consciousness require should be soothed. But it too frequently

does *not* secure us a favourable reception; it often, rather, generates envy, jealousy, and dislike.

I have lived to see, not merely my equals, but those almost as young as my children, rise to the highest honours, not only immediate and personal, but transmissible and inheritable. It must be said, then, that these honours are either easily won, or worth but little; or what, perhaps, is more accurate, that they are the prizes of a lottery, dependent on chances, which no one can command. It is true, that we could mention cases where they have been worth nothing to some, and even a curse to others. There is, in fact, a sort of worldly prudence, without which nothing can succeed among the selfish and base conflicts of mankind. Without this, genius devoid of virtue cannot succeed, nor genius united with virtue.

Many of the opinions which I indulged in my youth, but which I then suspected to be the dictates of an irritated temper, I have found in my age to be confirmed by

my experience and sober judgment. There is an intuitive sagacity bestowed on us, which gets at truths in early life without the slow processes of reason and observation. He who has not this, may think that he grows wiser as he advances in life, and as his knowledge increases; but he only continues to change one opinion for another, without any other cause of preference than its being the last.

Though good sense goes a very little way to constitute genius, yet without it genius is neither solid nor permanent. Sound judgment is a quality quite indispensable; and it will be found to have characterised every really great poet and really great genius in every line. Without it imagination runs riot, quits the course, and exhausts her strength over wilds and wildernesses, like a race-horse unreined. Critics and readers who do not attend to this, are apt to think all that is copiously imaginative to be *therefore* richly and highly poetical. Mere wanton imagination, which has no verisimility and does not embody truth, is

not genuine poetry; it is only a *will-o'-wisp!* Lord Byron was remarkable not merely for his powerful fancy and gigantic imagination, but for his wonderful *strength* and *depth* of *understanding*. He had always opinions because he had always active feelings; and then his understanding and intuitive judgment commonly secured the rectitude of those opinions. This will be deemed a strange position; but it is not an unconsidered one.

The grand ambition of literature ought to be, not merely to add to human knowledge, but to add to it in its highest departments: and of these the first is, the *moral knowledge of self*,—of our intellectual nature, as it is compounded of fancy, imagination, sentiment, reason, and memory. The temple where this is best learned is the Temple of the *Muses!* Not any false temple built with human hands, and devoted to a meretricious goddess; but that pure fane, into which no pretenders can gain entry, and where no affected and untrue sounds are heard. Without the light of imagination, which can only be had in

this temple, many of the best parts of our nature are quite impenetrable; and by its aid, scenery, beings, creations are unveiled, which are totally hid to the common eye. If poetry does not do this, or something like it, it is all empty;

" A cymbal's voice were better than the sound :" —

All idle poetry is more disgusting than most other idlenesses; and a good deal more disgusting than idle prose, because it makes more pretensions, and because metre without sense is a mockery. We do not want the artifices of language for that which we know already. To dress up a trite thought in fine diction, is like the decoration of an harlot, and can only deceive the ignorant. To express and illustrate more clearly or more elegantly an important thought not hitherto sufficiently developed, is quite a different thing.

On the other hand, novelty without truth is not only worth nothing, but mischievous; it is trick to which half-wits often resort to gain attention, and which frequently suc-

ceeds for a little while: the first glare of surprise dazzles the judgment, and it requires the sobriety of time to detect the fallacy. This class of false writers are to be found in every age of literature in every country; and as soon as they sink, and the spell is gone, there is a general astonishment how they ever could have risen; yet as long as they are up, there is an equal astonishment that any one should question their title to be on the wing! How many have we seen rise and fall in this way in the last forty years! It happens not unfrequently that authors do not emerge into fame who deserve it; but it very rarely happens, that if, deserving it, they once acquire fame, they ever lose it again. We remember *Blair's* Sermons in possession of unbounded popularity;—they are forgotten; and on examining them we shall find that they deserve to be forgotten. We are astonished that the dry, hard, cold, artificial style of *Robertson*, could ever have been received with so much favour. His matter, his researches, learning, disquisitions, and

calm philosophic judgment will preserve his fame, and give a standard value to his works, as history.

The utmost that a secondary author, even the foremost of his class, hopes, is emulation; or if he attempts originality, he starts into by-paths, and there he is generally entangled and lost, as he deserves to be: as an imitator, he may be endured, if he takes a good model, and chooses an useful subject.

If poets, instead of searching other authors for what they suppose they most easily and most effectually work into brilliant compositions, would watch their own thoughts, and embody the visions which most force themselves on their imaginations, or the reflections which their intercourse with life forces upon them with most emotion, they would stand a chance of adding something to the public stores of imagery and moral knowledge; because there is always a freshness, and there may be some nicety of difference, some variety of tint and colouring, and even form, in what comes direct from

the internal workings, the impressions, and feelings of the author, under circumstances which may have a chance of possessing some novelty or peculiarity of combination. But there is either a timidity in all but the very highest minds which is afraid to touch a new subject, or a new view of it; or where is not timidity, there is a rashness joined to impotence, which is vastly more objectionable and offensive. They who can go alone, will not; and they who cannot, rush unsupported into the middle of the arena, and expire in distortions.

There is no want of new countries which remain uncultivated and unexplored; but the indolence or weakness of human intellect is content to continue to till, in preference, a broken soil till it is exhausted. Therefore past inventions are applied to run-out grounds, and old flowers are planted in stale earth, till languor and lassitude overcome the frequenter of such gardens; and he hastens to the free air of the heath, though beset with briers, and brakes, and weeds.

It was said, that *Cowper* a little enlarged the bounds of poetry when he took up the lyre to sing his *Task*. I cannot perceive that he was much entitled to this praise. His formularies of phrase were principally those of his predecessors; his images, though faithful and fresh, were by no means such as were not already to be found in our poetry; his sentiments were amiable and natural, but very few of them were unfamiliar to us in his predecessors. He has a fearlessness of the colloquial, and of touching circumstances and incidents approaching to the homely, which contrasted with the stilted manner of those who immediately went before him, had the charm of novelty and an appearance of originality which did not really belong to it. But as he had no invention, he could give no splendour nor force to his poem; nor any of those deep and surprising emotions, which it is the delight and the boast of the grand poet to awaken! He leaves us tranquil with a sort of soothing benevolence and gentle sunshine, but he is not a magician;—he is a

moral companion, with a stream of philosophic wisdom enlightened by the beams of a clear autumnal sun, yet so gentle as to approach sometimes to languor; at the same time so translucent as to allow no shadowy haunts in which imagination might repose. Attractive and solacing as this poem is, its charms are not always exactly those which belong to the magic even of milder poetry of unmixed ore.

We ought never to confound names and qualities: we shall be told that if not the highest poetry, it is something *better!* It may be so: but that has nothing to do with the question. *Poetry* must be tried by its own tests, and not by tests which the critic may think would make it more useful. What is only *fancy*, cannot be made *creation!* To invent, and merely to reflect, are quite different acts.

LETTER II.

16th July, 1824.

I GREATLY prefer *Naples* to any other part of Italy. We spent more than six months there, from the end of May till about the 9th of December, 1820. On an early day of October, we undertook to go by sea up the bay to *Sorento*, to visit the birthplace of *Tasso*, about forty miles distant. We had engaged a boat and men a day or two before. The morning was ushered in with clouds, and predicted a storm; in the interval before embarkation it alternately cleared and scowled; the boatmen shook their heads, but our party were resolved. As we descended to the sea, deep clouds gathered again, and the rain already began, but it passed off for a little while once more, and forward we went. As we departed farther from the shore, the boatmen continued at intervals to look wistfully at the clouds, and shook their heads: they early

suggested the prudence of returning, but the desire of our party to proceed to their destination overruled them. The sailors here, strange as it may seem, though brought up to the sea from infants, are very timid, and their timidity makes them bad navigators. The sky continued to grow blacker, and the sea to become rough and agitated; large ships were seen at a distance driving before the wind, particularly an English man of war: the boatmen would only go forward by threats; they prayed us to put in at *Portici*, off which we now were, and to return by land. Captain S. took the direction, and attributed all to the boatmen's unnecessary fear. I had with me a wife, two sons, and several daughters; and I confess, I thought the perseverance a little fool-hardy.

When we had advanced about eight or ten miles up the bay, the rain came down in torrents, and the storm became decided; and at length it was consented that we should return and make the best of our way home. The waves ran very high, the

wind was strong, and the rain continued to drench us; the boatmen pulled hard through the rolling billows, but they grew pale and trembled with fear, and eight or ten miles in such a strong sea was an heavy task to work through; the waves dashed across us, and the spray and water continually broke over us; it was so squally, that the men dared not trust a sail. In the midst of all this danger, for I believe the danger was imminent, there was a mixture of grandeur in the occurrence, in the changing scowls of the sky, in the fitful appearances of the beautiful and varied coast of the bay, in the cutting through the stormy waters and riding upon the billow, in the freshness of the elements which were conflicting round us, in the place, in the recollection of the enterprize for which we had hazarded this danger, in the devotion thus paid to genius, in the dear name of *Tasso*, in the extraordinary beauty of lights which always attends the month of *October*, and pre-eminently so in such a climate, and amid such indescribably beautiful scenery as that of Naples,—

I say, that in all these associations, there were intermingled many noble and delightful emotions, which the perils to which we were exposed, and of which we were fully sensible, could not overcome. We at length reached the shore safe, after a voyage of about six hours; and never afterwards had an opportunity of visiting *Tasso*'s birth-place.

This was the third time that the lives of myself and a similar family party, were in imminent danger of a watery grave in an open boat: once in a storm off *Dungeness* point, in October 1804; and once in returning to *Deal* from the Downs with a celebrated Admiral, with whom we had been dining, about 1808, when the boat struck upon the fluke of an anchor under water, half a mile from the shore.

I have other things to tell of *Naples;* but this is not the place for the relation, as it would run into too long details.

I do not choose to be confined to place or time, but to skip from Naples to the mountains of Wales, or the wilds of Kent; and from my sixtieth year to go back to my

eighth, if I choose. I can remember one event when I was aged exactly three years and an half, at which Gray the poet was present, (but whom, I confess, I do not recollect,) and many scenes, events, feelings, and even conversations, the next year, 1767, which happened at *Margate*, where we spent that autumn. The next year, I remember the person and even the chariot of an uncle, who died in December 1769; and the messenger who announced the death of another relation (my godmother), in the following year (1770). Thence I scarce remember any thing till the day I was first carried to school in July 1771; that event has made an impression on me as distinct as if it happened yesterday. The picture, too, of every field about Wootton, every tree, every hedge, every look of the sky, will remain as long as my faculties last. I might well love home, for among strangers my little understanding was totally lost: I could not speak, and if I was spoken to, tears came into my eyes; I got through my lessons when I first went to school, but

otherwise I scarcely ever opened my lips; I was left alone in all plays and amusements, and mixed scarcely at all with other boys. On Saturday and Sunday a family in the neighbourhood, who lived in a very elegant manner, in a beautiful spot commanding a grand view of all the Weald of Kent, generally took me to their house: there I saw much company, but no one could ever get me to talk; I was therefore stared at, and generally considered of mental imbecility; yet I remember my kind hosts, the house, the garden, the manners, many of the incidents, the scenes of the road by which I returned, and my feelings on quitting the place to return to school, as if the whole were occurrences past not a week ago.

One of the greatest difficulties I have had in life has been to free myself from too strong *local* attachments. I was more than thirty years old, before I could feel that I could be happy in any residence but the spot of my nativity; and when that could not be, I settled as near it as I was

able: a most unfortunate predilection to which I attribute many of the disasters and miseries of my life. I was not calculated for a narrow neighbourhood, its provincial habits, and its petty intrigues: I was soon singled out like a struck deer, to be pursued and hunted down; and when in a work of fiction, I laid open a little of the character of my persecutors, in pictures too delicate and general to give any just cause of offence, this slight retribution was charged as an unpardonable crime.

I never visited the Continent till I took a short trip to *Brussels* and *Waterloo*, in September 1816. Two years afterwards I came to *Paris* and *Switzerland*, and have been in *Italy*, or at *Geneva*, ever since; and now in my old age, my local attachments are completely effaced. A residence on the Continent is, in various important respects, far preferable to England. I think *John Bull* very greatly over-estimates his own good qualities as well as his own advantages; nor does his wealth do him all the good he supposes. A foreigner takes his

plan *below* his means; and is, generally, in this respect, far more at his ease than an Englishman; he does not sacrifice so much to senseless show of establishments and equipages; and though there is a species of hospitality which habit has made necessary to an Englishman, and which, therefore, recompenses the cost, it is not only not necessary to others, but is fatiguing rather than pleasant to them. The political governments on the Continent are, no doubt, many of them bad; but I wish to refrain from mixing politics with literature, or the morality of private life, especially party politics, which are always coarse, vulgar, and deceitful: it is in the looks and the comforts of the *peasantry*, that the superiority of England over the Continent is to be found. The police of every city of Europe which I have seen, is far better than that of England. English literature is fashionable abroad, but its superiority may rationally be questioned; it excels in piquancy and fantasticality, if these be recommendations.

An Englishman, from robust exercise, from grosser food, and from a cold climate, is less spiritual than the people of southern Europe; when he *has* genius, and exerts it, it is more deep and grand; but all the lighter literature, especially of biography, memoirs, and literary history, is better done by the Italians and French.

I can never wonder that Lord Byron passed the last years of his life abroad, in spots where the scenery was so grand, and which were rendered interesting by so many historical associations of intense emotion. At *Ravenna* he mingled his imaginations with the spirit of *Dante*, who died, and was buried there. When *Shelley*, therefore, wrote his descriptive poem on the *Euganean Hills* near *Padua*, I wonder he did not dwell more fully and more eloquently on *Petrarch*; for there lies *Arqua*, where that great poet died, and was buried. I lament that I did not go to visit the spot when I was near it, having been twice at *Padua*. Captain S., who was of the party, (May 1821,) had more exertion, and turned

out of the road to pay his adoration at the shrine, and visit the humble abode where the inimitable love-poet breathed his last. *Tomasini's Petrarcha Redivivus* * gives a full and curious account of it. Thus have I been disappointed of seeing *Tasso*'s birth-place, and *Petrarch*'s tomb; but I have seen the vault at *Ferrara*, where poor Tasso was confined for seven years; and have lived for six months at Florence, where Dante was born; and have read the inscription over the house at *Reggio*, in which town (if not in the identical house) *Ariosto* was born. I have been familiar with the scenes so beautifully described by *Sannazaro*, and lived among the grandeur which fed in infancy the magnificent imagination of *Salvator Rosa*. I have resided for years by the lake and the mountains which inspired the delirious but beautiful visions of *Rousseau*, and daily pass the house where he was born; and, if this anti-climax may be permitted, I have often visited the re-

* See *Res Literariæ*, vol. i. *Naples*, 1820.

treat of *Voltaire*, at *Ferney;* a place as tame and as artificial as his genius. I have several times been at *Coppet*, so well known as the residence of *Madame de Stael*, and where *Lord Byron* was accustomed to pay her visits from his campagna on the opposite side of the lake, in the autumn of 1816: its natural beauties, though much vaunted by *Gibbon*, are very few; it belonged about the 12th and 13th century to the noble Burgundian family of *Grandson* (as well as the castle and barony of that name near Neufchatel). One branch of this family of Grandson transplanted themselves to England, and enjoyed the peerage; from the heiress descended the Countess of Richmond, mother of King Henry VII. One of Madame de Stael's best works is her earliest, her *Letters on Rousseau. Gibbon's* residence at *Lausanne* was scarcely more than thirty miles distant. I have visited the house there in which my famous relation* resided, with some curiosity.

* My grandmother was *Jane Gibbon*, first cousin to his grandfather Edward, who died 1736.

Books have been my passion from boyhood, and probably more than half of all my days from the age of twelve years have been spent in reading and writing. The earliest favourites I can recollect, after children's books, were, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *Walton's Lives*, the *Biographia Britannica*, *Philipot's Villare Cantianum*, and *Byron's Narrative*. My mother was born at *Penshurst*, and imbibed among the SYDNEYS a fondness for *Waller*'s poems, which she early taught to me. My mother had also by heart, almost all of Young's *Night Thoughts*, and his *Satires*, which, perhaps, she imbibed in childhood; for Young was a schoolfellow, fellow-collegian, and friend of her father; but she could never impart to *me* the taste for Young's compositions. I did not care much for the epigrammatic point of his *Satires*, and I liked still less the turgidity of his *Night Thoughts*. I began also to lose early the inherited fondness for *Waller*. I was about fourteen, when I took up a passion for the Odes of *Collins;* but at this time I preferred

modern (as well as ancient) Latin poetry, and my great favourite was *Buchanan*.

In 1777, my fifteenth year, I commenced seriously the ambition of writing English poetry; my favourite exercise was the translation of *Horace*'s Odes into English verse, and I was confirmed in my ambition to be a poet by the success of some English verses, given as a task at the end of this year.

It cannot be doubted, that the passion for this fame turns the mind to the study of nature, and the watchfulness of the internal movements of the bosom, with a degree of taste and nicety, which it would scarcely otherwise bestow.

LETTER III.

17th July, 1824.

THOUGH affliction and misfortune are not patiently endured, mere absence of evil is not ease; languor and want of stimulus render the passage of life fatiguing and even painful; it is under excitement, amid hope and fear, that all the scenery of the creation impresses itself vividly upon us; and that the changes of the day and the season are associated with so many thousand energies. I never had much ease from the injuries and anxieties of life; but if by chance any little interval of calm has intervened, I have soon found that with my sufferings vanished also half my pleasures.

I am not much disposed, therefore, to think that a poet's life is well led in peace and indolence. I know not that the life of any great poet has been so led: certainly, neither that of Dante, Petrarch, Ariosto, Tasso, Spenser, Camoens, Milton, Collins, Chatterton, Burns, nor Lord Byron. All

is little better than empty sound where the chords of the heart are not deeply touched, and a plaintive and pathetic moral tone does not prevail over the rest. Men who have passed a dull unagitated life never yet had the power of bestowing this character on their compositions.

It is more annoying than it ought to be to go into common society, and hear the habitual talk and artifices by which genius is attempted to be reduced to the level of common rules, and to have its excellence tried by the tests of performing well those petty offices of society and little ceremonials necessary to carry on and fill up the functions of common characters. "Do "not talk to me," I hear it said, "of the "genius and poems of —— ——; they "are a great deal too much cried up: I "knew him; nothing could be more irre- "gular than his habits and the conduct of "his house and table; his manners were "uncertain, his companions ill-chosen, and "his conversation fitful; he would not mix "in society and do as others do: do not

" talk to me of a knack of making verses, " if a man has not sense enough to do that. " Common sense, I say, common sense for " *me*, that is the test all the world over." This is not the talk of an individual only; it is the language of all the species, and is heard from some one's lips, into whatever company we go.

At the same time, such is the inconsistency of human nature, that if there be any thing really extravagant, objectionable, and unbecoming in a man of genius, *that* is exactly what the world of fashion and the more vulgar mob, (for both are senseless mobs,) set up as the idol of their blind admiration: nine-tenths of the meteors of fashion and of popular distinction are persons of false and affected eccentricities; and if they happen to have genius, which is rarely the case, they are admired for those eccentricities, not for that which constitutes their real merit. It is long, if ever, before genius unaided by any thing accidental, and more calculated to strike vulgar notice, emerges into popular fame; and one can show something accidental and

extraneous in almost every popular writer, which has contributed to bring him into the people's favour.

The great purpose of genius is to increase and improve our intellectual pleasures, and to embody the ideal part of the world in which we are placed: all other pleasures are worth little, expire soon, and revive less and less frequently; whereas these acquire strength as they go on, and each increase is but the prelude of one greater in future. The world around us may not be exactly what we would wish to make it, and Bishop Berkeley's theory is a little too extravagant, and the imagination may do much in forming a creation which shall approach to our desires; not, perhaps, with mankind, whose activity of evil cannot be much softened or diverted, but with the scenery around us, the inanimate forms of things, with most of the incidents and occupations of our own lives, with our feelings, our habits, and our superiority to the mortifications and injuries of society.

If authors only tell us that which a com-

mon eye, placed in the same situation, could see, they tell us little. The faculty of pointing out characteristic features, the observations, reflections, associations of the past, the sentiments and emotions raised, show the power and give the charm. These are the merits which make narratives in prose and descriptions in poetry as instructive as they are delightful. But they cannot be produced by minds of ordinary endowment, or ordinary cultivation. They require fine faculties long trained, deeply attentive, and never idle. It is not the intense exercise of a single mental power which will effect a grand purpose: if, for instance, a poet of a natively vivid fancy were, by an exertion of vast memory, to heap together in one poem all the rural images in which poetry deals, it would not make a good poem; it would confuse by a chaos of lights. Arrangement, discrimination, keeping, contrast, are necessary; and neither fancy nor imagination can be employed to any useful purpose without the aid of judgment.

There is no judgment in those multitudes

of eccentric poets who pour out their imaginations in any wild course which their whim suggests, to catch notice by surprise, and the force of false stimulants. But this is not so bad as the universal trick of aping any manner of temporary fashion, which in a few months is certain to inundate the public press, and which shows the extreme facility of catching an outward manner. Thus Sir *Walter Scott*, Lord *Byron*, *Wordsworth*, &c., all had their immediate imitators, which filled booksellers' counters as well as the columns of magazines and newspapers. They had each the shape, but not the soul, of their original; but the main likeness consisted in the exaggeration of *defects*. There is nothing so disgusting as this sort of mimickry; not intended to ridicule, but to rival. An individual manner ought never to be imitated. But what is most provoking of all is, that common readers, wherever their sincere opinion can be obtained, almost always *prefer* the copy; which is an unequivocal sign that the *faults* of a poem are what please them.

It is quite impossible that ordinary talents and ordinary habits should, if left to themselves, prefer a fine work of fiction to one of a vulgar level. Every one sympathises most with that which is most accordant to his own tone of feeling, his own trains of thought, and his own forms of language. A boarding-school girl enjoys most a novel written by a young lady, whose mind is full of beaux and belles, of milliners, assemblies, dances, routes, of the conversations between confidential inamoratas, and such views of the characters of life as females take when they first enter into society. Sprightly dialogues, larded with fashionable phrases, are exquisite; and the gallantry of a dandy lover, mixed up with the least spice of wit and humour, is proof of resistless genius that at once *comes home to the bosom*, beyond all the *Shakspeares*, *Otways*, *Werters*, *Byrons*, in the world.

But what novel has outlasted the manners of its age? Who now reads *Fielding*, *Smollet*, *Richardson*, *Mackenzie*, *Burney*, *Radcliffe*, *Charlotte Smith*? Who reads

Boccacio, Don Quixote, Gil-Blas, Gulliver, Robinson Crusoe? Pompous editions of them are sometimes printed to look handsome on library-shelves; but nobody looks into them, unless to inspect a new set of illustrative engravings. Nothing continues to be read for generations (not even history) but standard poetry of pure and rich ore, written in language not too remote and obsolete; such as *Milton, Shakspeare, Dryden, Pope, Thomson, Collins, Gray;* and in prose, such as *Bacon, Cowley, Addison, Johnson,* and *Burke.*

It is genius not *overwrought* which produces works of the exact temperament fitted for long endurance. Too little fire does not reach the mark, too much overshoots it. There is a stern counteraction of sobering reason, which, like the clouds that render the dazzle of the sunshine more wholesome and more beautiful, mellows down the flame which would carry imagination beyond its strength into dangerous or delusive regions.

I believe that every one who has a

moderate share only of intellectual ability may be useful, instructive, and even entertaining in literature, if he will not go out of the path for which his talents are calculated. It is an undue ambition and vanity which provokes him into a failure. Had *Hayley* only written prose-essays on literature, and confined himself to *translation* in poetry, he might have obtained an important place in his own class; he was an elegant scholar; his reading was extensive; his taste was delicate, if not deep; his memory was quick and capacious; and if he was not an original and profound thinker, he caught the surface with ease and ingenuity, if not with force; and had a style, where he confined himself to his own province and to the thoughts of which he was a master, with an elegant facility suited to the character of his ideas. Occasionally, where he dealt in matter too high for him, he was verbose, full of unmeaning superlatives, and fatiguing by vain efforts at strength. He had a very feeble fancy, and no imagination; nor were the powers of his reason vigorous, or his

intuitive sagacity great. He moved by the light of other minds, and sometimes caught a little reflected heat; and, by the aid of acquisition, produced observations which, if not fresh and striking, gave a gentle pleasure by their rationality and justness. In matters of literature, in bringing forth the stores of an elegant taste, in assisting the reader by new arrangements, by pointing out what before might have escaped him, or to which, from its being buried among the dust of libraries, or in the mass of obsolete matter, he might not have had access; a mind deficient in all the essential qualities of genius may yet compose works of great interest, intelligence, and merit. Hayley wrote biography; but not with much eloquence, force, and discrimination. His *Memoirs of Cowper* can scarcely be called *a life*, though the materials will always render them interesting. His *Life of Romney*, the painter, approaches nearer to a *narrative;* but the subject was not of equal importance. We may sometimes be amused and instructed by a book, when it

does not convey any strong impression of the ability of its author. It may want fertility, acuteness, or originality of reflection; but still the facts may entertain. The *notes* to Hayley's poems are full of interesting, though light, literature.

Hayley sold *Eartham* to Mr. Huskisson, and resided the latter years of his life in a marine villa at *Falpham* on the Sussex coast. He was not very kindly used by the literary world in his latter days:

——— "a spritelier age
"Came tittering on, and shoved him from the stage."

But few of them had his literature, though many of them had more genius; and, after all, his works, though not for their poetry, are more valuable for their matter than most of theirs. He had been strangely set up, about forty-three years ago, as a temporary idol, for his *Triumphs of Temper*, a most vapid piece of prosaic versification; and he paid afterwards most bitterly for an exaltation, which was not any trick of his: it was some whim of silly fashion, of which

the ton was given by some fool who possessed the influence of the day. Hayley's attachment to *Cowper* was amiable; and the more so, because no two writers of verses could have a taste less congenial.

Had Hayley never been an author, perhaps he would have been happier; for he had faculties well adapted to the pleasure of reading. He perceived the ideas of others, relished the acquisition of knowledge, and had a memory which treasured it up. Men of more original minds have something within them which refuses to amalgamate with others so freely; which rejects, rebels, and is disturbed unless it can find vent for its own counter speculations: at any rate, it cannot take opinions or assertions on mere faith or authority, and is not content till it has discussed the point for itself. To such minds reading gives more pain than pleasure, unaccompanied by investigation; but who will take the labour to investigate, and to put his investigation into writing, merely that it may remain buried in his common-place book?

Scarce any poet has written so many verses with so little poetical energy, and so little originality, as Hayley.

That character of imaginative enthusiasm, to which the word *romantic* is (with little regard to accuracy) commonly applied, belonged in no degree to Hayley. So far as he saw things at all, he saw them as they were; he could create nothing, but he saw them faintly, without energy or force; he used, therefore, superlative, but prosaic, words, to reflect that with strength of which he had himself but a dim idea. He who has a lively fancy has senses which hold dominion over him; but if he has active and powerful imagination also, the dominion is sometimes despotic, in spite of a sound and energetic understanding. All those factitious ardours, put on by pliant conceptions, ready memories, and vain desires of fame, do not outlast the occasion. If such persons affect the presence of the Muse, it is a muse of art, labour, and mechanical rule.

But they who have great native genius extinguish oftener than encourage it, by a

management which mistakes its tendencies, its powers, and its proper food. It is by watching unstudied movements of the mind and heart, not by wasting toil in pursuit of gaudy expressions, that the stores of poetical invention accumulate, and that the freshness and truth which stamp power, and give value, are imparted to its ingredients; every shadowy form, accustomed to flit across the mind, and then vanish again, is, when it is thus embodied, a new treasure. Were we to collect from Lord Byron's works all the hitherto undelineated shapes, and undeveloped emotions, which he thus threw into form, or made palpable by language, we should observe the amount with astonishment. Great as his powers were, part of the secret of this success lay in the boldness and directness with which he employed those powers.

LETTER IV.

17th July, 1824.

CAMPBELL * has spoken of MILTON's juvenile poems as "composed in the happiest "years of the author's life, at his father's "country house at Horton," in Buckinghamshire. Perhaps it was the happiest, when his imagination was young and fresh, but at the same time strong and brilliant; but I know not on what authority Campbell founds this assertion. Does he draw it from the poems? These certainly breathe of delight: I mean the Latin ones more than the English, for in those are contained the greatest number of allusions to his private life and habits; and the refined innocence of his amusements, his studies, his sentiments, his susceptibility to the beauty of rural images, all ought to have made the

* Essay i. p. 237.

enjoyment of those days gratifying to such a genius as his. Still I doubt if youth be, in fact, the happiest period of life: our expectations are *then* unchastised, and are, therefore, sure to be disappointed: if our sensibility is more awake, it is more awake to what displeases, as well as to what pleases; our disgusts are as lively as our joys: as we grow old, we accustom ourselves to keep down much of that irritable temper which is the bane of our self-complacence. Milton was, probably, like most other great poets, gloomy and recluse, and did not chime in well with the world, yet was angry that it neglected him: this inconsistency softens with years, and we reconcile ourselves to our retirement, and the world's little notice of us.

But there is another reason why I think that Milton's latter days might not have been less happy than those of his youth. I cannot suppose that, during the employment of composing *Paradise Lost*, he was not happy above the lot of common mortals. To be habitually conversant with such a

stupendous display of imagination, and the holy and sublime sentiments which he associated with it, must necessarily confer on existence a degree of enjoyment which the ordinary lot of humanity cannot even comprehend; and which the brilliance of the poet's earlier pieces, great as it was, did not anticipate.

I do not say this ambitiously: it seems to me, speaking from a practical attention to human nature, that the daily conversance with such images and thoughts as those of Milton's divine poem could not avoid imparting to him the felicity I have ascribed to it.

There is yet a youthful glow in his juvenile poems distinct from the more sober but more intense splendor of his later productions. I shall never forget the years when I first had all this little volume almost by heart. It was the autumn of 1780, in the two months' interval between school and college. Every morning of *September*, and it was a glorious September, I rose early; and with this book in my pocket, or my

hand, sallied into the wild fields of Wootton, and gazed upon the morning sun almost before the mists were dispersed. Then I read the *L'Allegro* over and over, almost till I was in a delirium; I hung over a stile or a gate, and listened to all the distant rural sounds with ecstacy: the Latin poems were then as much my favourites as the English. This month, perhaps, was the mark put upon my destiny. In this mood I quitted Wootton, in October, for *Cambridge;* and there I continued to read *Milton*, and *Shakspeare*, and *Spenser*, instead of mathematics and metaphysics, at which my tutors were exceedingly wrathful, and for which I was set down as a dreaming romantic young man, unfit for society and progress in life. The next month my father died on the verge of sixty-nine, and I never returned to Wootton as my home. When the right devolved to me in these latter years it was too late: my family had other destinies: and after having been withheld from it by primogeniture during the most important portion of my life, I have, by the strange

and perverse course of fate, surrendered it to my *younger* brother. Some years are passed since, by violent abruptions, it lost its charms for *me.*

I cannot relate the details of my stormy life, and the *witch-like* tempests I have had to encounter, because it would involve so many private affairs and private persons, wherewith the public has no concern and no interest. Nor would it end here; for it would involve also certain persons who will not allow themselves to be private; and by which I should incur the hazard of being pursued for what is called *scandalum magnatum.* There are certain cases where power is too strong for truth, and proof into the bargain. Certainly many of the vaunts made of the protection which our constitution affords are as baseless as a dream. The other day I read a case in one of the courts, where it was seriously contended that a man might arrest on *one side* of an account; and the question was disposed of on another point, leaving this position undecided. So if there are mutual

debts and credits between two merchants, and A owes B *fifty* thousand pounds, but is creditor to B for *one hundred* thousand pounds, B may arrest A for fifty thousand pounds. If this be the law (I scarcely can suppose it), then, I cannot conceive that any other laws in the world can produce a specimen of such absurdity and crying injustice. But I do believe that our laws contain more absurd things than any other known code of laws.

On my father's death my mother, who was left with a good jointure, and a large disposable fortune, retired to Canterbury; and eighteen months afterwards took a lease from Lord Dudley of a mansion a mile from the town, which had been the seat of the famous admiral Sir George Rooke, whose son married Lord Dudley's aunt, and died issueless. It was a pleasant and respectable old house; and there, in the autumn of 1782, I wrote my earliest *sonnets*, which my classical friend, who now presides over the common law of England, made me correct, with a severity little

suited to my natural haste and carelessness. I added others, written at the same place in the autumns of 1783 and 1784, and published them in *March*, 1785. I find nothing in them which I would wish to alter or recall. I never varied but two words in any subsequent edition, "*askest thou*" instead of "*ask'st thou*," as too harsh, which necessitated the omission of a monosyllabic epithet; and "*store to strew*" instead of "*treasure strew*," in the sonnet on *Echo and Silence*, to cure the ellipsis of "*to*." I did not altogether belong to a poetical family, though my eldest sister wrote verses with facility; and had most of the popular English poets by heart. My brother had known *Gray*, the poet, who had shown great attention to him at college, and he was therefore proud of talking of him; but this was an accidental rather than an inherent taste; he had not enough of deep energy to relish him truly; he liked little piquant things, such as epigrams, which are properly called by Edward Phillips "the fag end of poetry," and which almost always

sacrifice truth to a point. *Martial* was my aversion, even at school. I do not love to turn serious things into a jest; it hardens the heart. Indeed I was always either reprobated, railed at, or ridiculed for my gravity.

I had always a turn for genealogy; but I think it was not till the spring of 1783 that I paid much attention to the technicalities of heraldry. I persuade myself that I remember the very day. It was a fitful April morning when we took a long walk to visit Lord Cowper's decayed mansion, called the *Moat*, on the *Sandwich* road, about a mile and a half from Canterbury, standing in an old walled park. It was an half-timbered house, many centuries old, and had been the residence of Lord-Keeper *Finch*. Over the spandrils of the chimney-piece of the largest room were various arms and quarterings, I think all of the *Finch* family, which struck my attention; I noted their forms; and as I supposed the quarterings to be those of old Kentish families, I set myself to work, as soon as I

came home, to search them out by such books as I then had. It was a day when the changing appearances of the sky, with showers of rain, had made an impression on my fancy, and set my imagination to work; and it took the turn of arraying forth feudal manners, and the images of chivalrous times. The fit continued some time upon me, and I made great progress in this study. The jester is welcome to his laugh; nor do I suppose that his laugh will be at all turned aside by being reminded that *Gray* and young *Chatterton* were adepts in heraldic knowledge: it is a key to intelligence among ancient buildings, castellated and ecclesiastic, for *there* it is a language.

I do not think that I was happy at this period; my mind was full of projects and wild ambitions, and I attempted too many things which I had not strength to execute; and which always ended, therefore, in the destruction of my self-complacence. A month after the publication of my poems, which was in March, 1785, I met with a dreadful accident in my chambers in the

Temple, by cutting the tendons of the fingers of one of my hands, which, in pulling down a window, had burst through a pane of glass. The most dreadful pains ensued; my arm was inflamed to the shoulder; I was a fortnight without sleep, and then the whole system of my frame began to be affected, even to the opposite extremities. I was removed to my sister's house in *Wimpole Street*, or *Harley Street*; then my opposite ancle became paralytic, and I could not walk: the surgeon was puzzled; old Dr. *Heberden* was called in: I grew worse and worse, with many strange symptoms. As I lay half-lifeless on a sofa one morning in May, with a frame convulsed in every part, and spirits which required to be cheered, Mr. *Maxwell*, my brother-in-law (a man of great talent and elegant literature), brought me in a bundle of *Reviews*, and showed me, with benevolent triumph, *Maty's Review* of my SONNETS. Faint as I was, it gave me a glow such as nothing else of my literary concerns has ever since given me. I languished till July,

and then was removed for *sea-air* to Dover, where, in the early part of the autumn, I at length recovered. I was then in my twenty-third year.

My faculties never recovered till I wrote *Mary de Clifford*, in the autumn of 1791, an interval of six years. During that dark period I was a mere genealogist, and heraldic antiquary; my ambition for the higher pursuits of literature was totally oppressed, and almost extinguished; I lost that self-estimation without which nothing good can be done; my shyness did not diminish; but the energies that belonged to me gathered inward in masses, and turned to morbid gloom. I lived two years and a half in *Hampshire*, the third I came to *London*, where I bought a house in a new street. I spent the autumn of 1789 in an excursion into Leicestershire and Derbyshire, with my friend and fellow-collegian, *Shaw*, the historian of Staffordshire; and returning the end of *September*, I visited the *Chandos* vault, and took notes of the coffin-plates at *Cannons*. When I arrived

at my house in London, intelligence came the next morning to me that the Duke of *Chandos* died at Tunbridge Wells, the day and nearly the hour I had spent in the vault at *Cannons!* I little thought then what vexations, and costs, and injuries, that event was to bring upon us. How many years it was to consume in litigation, in the most provoking of all attendances.

" Full little knowest thou, that hast not tried,
What hell it is in suing long to bide;
To lose good days that might be better spent,
To waste long nights in pensive discontent;
To speed to day, to be put back to morrow,
To feed on hope, to pine with fear and sorrow;
To have thy prince's grace, yet want her peers," &c.

When I was not in odious attendance at the Lord's bar, (a new sort of tribunal, except on *writs of error*, to which *Blackstone*, Lord *Holt*, Lord *Hale*, &c., say, that in civil cases their jurisdiction is confined,) I spent the years 1792, 1793, 1794, 1795, in building and farming; two easy modes of incurring unlimited expence without any return, or any enjoyment, which withdraw

the attention from all that is useful or amusing, and leave it to pore over bills and outgoings, where every thing is chicanery and fraud; where every grain of corn is grown at twice the expence of its market price, and ten labourers do not the work of three; where any fraud upon a *gentleman* is a virtue, and where all the farmers combine to make a landlord sick of tilling his own land; where the steward cannot make his men work, and if he makes them work, will not let his employer have the benefit of it; where all that there is to *pay*, the employer is called on to pay; and all that there is to *receive*, goes into the steward's pocket. A literary man ought, above all others, to avoid the voracious net of such concerns; and, of all literary men, he who gives himself up to fancy and imagination: a poet and a farmer see every object in lights directly opposite. There are, if I recollect, some good stanzas on this point in *Shenstone*'s too diffuse *Ode* on *Rural Elegance*.

Shenstone was a poet, but feeble and

effeminate; though not so sickly as some of our moderns in this age, in which robust extravagance and insipidity are equally admired. There is no excuse for insipidity whatever be the faults of the age; it is not insipid except in the taste here alluded to. The revolutionary war of twenty-two years, with all its incidents, gave it energy. And now the warriors, who lived so many years in activity and peril, are left to rust, and pine, and stagnate in obscurity; half of them dispersed, in humble poverty, over the Continent, of which, but a few fleeting years past, they were lords and conquerors. But their minds have been filled with the grand scenes and energetic movements to which they have been witnesses; and they love, therefore, bold fictions, impressive tales, and images of all that variety of grand scenery with which their adventurous lives have made them familiar.

It is not in dangers, and anxieties, and alternations of great toil and dreaming leisure, that the imagination is dormant or oppressed. I have slept best under the

most exhausting griefs, and have been most sensible of the pleasures of life when I have been most surrounded by misfortunes. Up to the month of August, 1818, I was a profound sleeper in the midst of gigantic evils; from that time I have scarcely known any but broken slumbers; and never felt that pleasing heaviness which I used to hail as a refuge from sorrow and despair. But what I have felt, I presume that thousands of others have felt; and that, in the midst of their anxious and enterprising life, they could enjoy all the energies of refined imagination and literary genius.

I cannot suppose that those puny images of domestic tameness, and those morbidly languid sentiments, which are the proper effusions of a *petit-maître* sick with luxurious wealth, and never accustomed to emerge from the factitious comforts of London and its surrounding villas, or, at best, beyond some watering-place, to which Bond Street and Thames Street turn out their mingled shopkeepers in September to inhale health and imbibe purity for the coming winter

and spring, — I cannot suppose that these are to the taste of the vigorous sons of Mars and Neptune.

Nothing can be done for a mind which is like a cold, dry, hungry, light sand; a little infusion of the water of Helicon may be brought by art to sprinkle upon it; but the utmost this can do is to give it a momentary tint of soil upon the surface. Poetry, which is poverty-struck, depresses the spirits, like a low, tame, lugubrious tone from a week musical instrument. Where there is *invention*, there may be some little excitement, even when the ingredients are insipid; but a sickly fancy, or mere reflection, is unendurable.

I am quite convinced, that a strong understanding should be combined with genius; but it is often much later before that understanding operates on the author's judgment of the general affairs of life than on his genius: in his early years it directs his genius right, when it still leaves his knowledge of mankind, and of the world, inaccurate and imperfect; so that, on look-

ing back, he remembers, with regret and astonishment, the errors and blindness of his opinions and sentiments on many incidents and views in the currents of human affairs; when, in his literary concerns, he can discover nothing which varies from his present ideas of rectitude and taste. This confirms the assumption, that knowledge of the world is more an acquisition, and the fruits of genius more the result of a native gift.

But till imagination is impregnated with a deep insight into the course of human actions, and the tendencies and colourings of the human passions, it can never have that mellowness, that use, and that inexhaustible attraction, of which, when thus associated, enriched, and directed, it is capable. It took this turn with Lord *Byron* at an earlier age than with almost any other poet. It will always give him an advantage over all merely descriptive poets, and all poets of whimsical invention.

We live under a moral consciousness that we ought to desire knowledge, and learn as much as thought and watchfulness will teach us of the intellectual nature and propensities of our being.

LETTER V.

19th July, 1824.

SCARCELY any one enters *Italy* without a heated imagination of the excellence of the *arts* in that favourite country, but he is not afterwards disappointed. I think the *statuary* still finer than the *painting*. We passed the *Simplon* in October, 1819, and entered Italy by *Domo d'Ossola*. At *Milan*, the Gothic cathedral and the pictures are magnificent, and the Ambrosian library full of curiosity, especially for its MSS. so lately explored by *Abbé Maio*, and its *Virgil* with *Petrarch*'s autograph on *Laura*. When we passed the bridge of *LODI*, we were surprised to find it a long, flat, weak, wooden bridge. At *Parma*, *Reggio*, and *Modena*, there was enough to fill the mind: the paintings at Parma are noble, especially the Correggios. We did not see the pictures at *Bologna*, though we slept twice (in 1819

and 1821) at that large but rather dull city: there we were overtaken, the first time, by my friend and relation Sir *Mark Sykes* and Lady *S.* In about a month we took leave of him at *Florence* for the last time, on his departure for *Rome.* He was still busy to the last in collecting treasures for his magnificent library. I encountered him frequently at booksellers' shops at Florence, especially at *Molini*'s.

The inspection of the riches in the gallery at *Florence* would not be exhausted in months. The pictures of the Grand Duke at the Pitti palace are more select: it contains a few, perhaps, even more interesting than those of the gallery; but I almost prefer the *Venus de Medicis* to all the paintings; it is even more beautiful than Imagination's happiest dreams.

The month of November was principally warm and genial at Florence, especially at its commencement; but as the winter advanced, particularly in December and January, the weather was bitterly cold.

We were in the *Casa Nicolini*, a large and magnificent but dull and cold palace, of one of the noble and distinguished families here. As the season became severe, I felt the chill of the stone and brick floors to my legs; and about the 1st of January, 1820, I became so seriously affected, as to be confined a week to my bed in great tortures, and three months to the sofa. By the *skill* of Dr. Down, the English physician here, my life was saved. To amuse the heavy hours, I then wrote the tale of Sir *Ralph Willoughby*, and compiled the *Ataviæ Regiæ*.

At the end of April (1820), we quitted Florence for *Leghorn;* and after staying about seventeen days in that city, where the harbour affords a noble promenade, we hired an English merchant brig to convey us by sea to *Naples*. We had a long passage, beating about for eleven days in the Mediterranean, the weather intensely hot, and in a little cabin much straightened for room. When we arrived, we had three days' quarantine to perform, in a close-stowed burn-

ing harbour; and then, from the informality of my passport not being signed by the Neapolitan consul at Leghorn, as well as by the English, I was near being imprisoned, but for the interference of Sir Henry Lushington, the English Consul-General. This was at the end of May, 1820.

We took apartments in the *Ciaia*, commanding a most magnificent view of the *Bay of Naples*, and of *Mount Vesuvius*; and here we remained till about the 9th of December. Under us were the apartments of Prince Henry of Prussia. We resided here, undisturbed, during the whole *Carbonari revolution:* not without occcasional fears and warnings of the danger of remaining at Naples. A guard was mounted at the doors of the ambassadors, especially Sir *William A'Court*'s, who resided a few houses distant from us. But I take for granted, that whatever calmness appeared on the surface, there were internal movements not at all visible to the common eye. Sir W. A'Court, who had better means of information, certainly did not think that

all was as it appeared outwardly: he constantly suggested to the English the prudence of departure; and I always found Sir William A'Court of as much sound sense, sagacity, and intelligence, as politeness. His manners were elegant, yet frank; his conversation easy, entertaining, and full of information. It may be supposed that an eye-witness may have something curious to say of this extraordinary revolution; but I do not like to write histories or memoirs on superficial appearances, and at a time when party-politics raise heats which will receive nothing fairly from a cool spectator, even of what he *can* see. There is nothing so offensive to a cultivated mind as the babble of party-politics, on *either* side. I reserve, therefore, my observations on this subject; at least I will say no more of it in the present letter.

We quitted Naples for *Rome*, in December, and had a narrow escape of the *brigands*, who had taken a party of travellers up into the mountains the preceding day, from the road near *Fondi* and *Illri*. We

were twice benighted, and started before the sun rose. It was past seven o'clock, before we reached *Terracina*, and had been dark for more than an hour: we had mounted dragoons to guard us from the *Pope's Gate*. The large hotel at Terracina was crowded with travellers, principally English.

We remained at *Rome* till about the 7th of April, 1821. St. Peter's, the Vatican, the palaces, the antiquities, overwhelm the mind by the strength of their impressions, and the multitude of their associations. It is the statuary at the *Vatican* which is the most abundant and the most perfect. The private palaces are full of magnificent paintings: I preferred those of the *Doria* to those of any other private palace. At the *Colonna* was the noblest room I have ever seen. The *Colonna* books were on sale, and I bought many both curious and cheap. The conventual libraries are many of them rich, but Rome is hastening to decay: the air is heavy; and to me appears unhealthy even in winter: in summer it is death to a

foreigner. *John Keats* the poet died here, at the age of twenty-five, during our residence; but I did not know him, and did not hear of his death at the time. I confess that there was something in the air of Rome very oppressive to my spirits, and I was glad to leave it. But I contrived to print a book here, the second volume of *Res Literariæ:* I had printed the first volume at *Naples,* during the free press of the Carbonari government. We visited the shop of the works of the much-vaunted *Canova:* I was greatly disappointed. This will be deemed a treason to taste: but my business is to speak my own opinions and feelings, not those of others. The author of *Rhymes on the Road* has given a very different judgment.

We passed by Florence, Bologna, Ferrara, Rovigo, Padua, to Venice; thence back by Padua, Vincenza, &c., Brescia, Milan, &c., Turin, Mont-Cenis, Chambery, to Geneva, where we arrived 12th May, 1821. Any recollections of these places I shall introduce as they occur; but I do not mean to write an *Itinerary,* or *Tour.*

Books of that sort have long since been multiplied to satiety.

If I am asked, why I have passed such an unproportionably long time at Geneva, I could give many reasons of convenience, but I do not know that I am bound to give any. Perhaps I shall say more of Geneva in the course of these letters, of its scenery, its habits, its historical interests, but I do not like to begin a subject which will draw me into long and regular details; I prefer that which gives me the liberty of glancing from topic to topic, and of giving detached opinions and sentiments rather than facts.

One cannot refrain from reflecting with some interest, that the line of travels here noticed was that which was once pursued by MILTON; who, in 1638, quitted England for *Paris*, and thence went on to *Florence;* and, after a stay of two months in that city, to *Sienna* and *Rome;* whence, after another stay of two months, he passed on to *Naples*, there formed an intimacy with *Manso*, the patron of Tasso; came back to *Rome;* returned to *Florence;* visited *Lucca;* then

went to *Venice*, and so to *Geneva;* where he formed a friendship with *John Diodati* and *Frederick Spanheim.* He passed back through *France*, and reached England again, after an absence of a year and three months.

In March, 1739, Gray commenced his travels with Horace Walpole, and followed nearly the same course. On October 8. 1739, they visited the *Grande Chartreuse*, and *Geneva;* on November 7. reached *Turin;* November 21. *Genoa;* December 3. *Bologna;* December 18. *Florence;* quitted Florence, March 1740; and 31st March, reached *Rome;* June, *Naples:* after a stay of nine or ten days, July 14. returned to Florence; and remained at Florence from August 1740, to 24th April 1741. On 24th April, 1741, quitted Florence; and then Gray parted from Walpole at *Reggio.* On July 15. Gray reached Venice; thence by *Padua, Verona, Milan;* on August 15. *Turin;* 16th, crossed the *Alps;* revisited the *Grande Chartreuse*, and inscribed in the Album there his famous Latin Ode. Au-

gust 25. 1741, reached *Lyons;* and September 1. once more reached London. On November 6th following his father died: this was followed by the death of his friend *Richard West*, on 31st May, 1742.

At *Florence*, Gray wrote that most exquisite Latin fragment which so exactly describes the scenery on the banks of the *Arno*.

" Oh Fæsulæ amœna
Frigoribus juga, nec nimium spirantibus auris,
Alma quibus Tusci Pallas Deus Apennini
Esse dedit, glaucâque suâ canescere sylvâ!
Non ego vos posthac Arni de vallè videbo
Porticibus circum, et candenti cincta coronâ
Villarum longe nitido consurgere dorso,
Antiquamve ædem, et veteres præferre cupressus
Mirabor, tectisque super pendentia tecta."

This is the exact scenery from the public park, or drive, called *The Cassini*, on the banks of the Arno, above the city.

This is not the way in which Lord Byron would have described the same scenes, but there are different sorts of excellence. Lord Byron would have dashed out something more bold, more savage, more like

Salvator Rosa's pictures; in which the features of solitude, of ruins, or of gloom, had been made more prominent; his plaintiveness would have been less delicate and soft; his expressions would have been those of unshorn strength: whereas in Gray, though there is a freshness, a lucidness, a natural and vivid sensibility, there is a classical sort of finish, an exquisite tone of refinement, which bespeaks high art, though it is the perfection exempt from any traces of the workmanship of art. Lord Byron comes nearer to "the native wood-notes wild" of Shakspeare. I sometimes approach to Johnson's opinion, that a little more cultivation and practice would have made Gray superior in his Latin poetry even to his English. I know scarce any thing lyrical, which continues to delight me so much as the *Ode at the Grande Chartreuse*. The poet's prose letter on the subject of the *Chartreuse*, dated *Turin*, 16th November, 1739, is also exquisite, and full of the most rich poetical ideas. Gray was now about the age of twenty-three. Such

delicacy of sentiment, and such splendour of imagination as his, ought to have made him happy, but he was splenetic and low-spirited; and when at length his name became renowned, heard little of the distant voices that bore it upward, passed his days principally in his rooms at *Pembroke College*, solitary, fastidious, and, perhaps, peevish. Books were his resource, and his curiosity was awake to every part of polite literature, and to all the arts. Still he read somewhat languidly, and without a definitive purpose. Still to collect, and digest, and embody, from day to day, and year to year; and yet after long lapses to look back, but find nothing done; no growing mass; no raised pyramid; but all past as it has come, without a trace or relic;—the retrospect, at length, chills the energy of the future, and blights the rising thought in the bud: the author says to himself, as he feels an awakening glow, "What avails it? to-morrow it "will be like that of yesterday, past and "forgotten!" But when the visions of the mind are realised by words, and preserved

by the pen, we see the structure grow as the days pass over us, and we count the time by marks, of which every setting sun adds to the value. It is not by single efforts that the greatest genius can produce that of which it is capable. It must have space, and freedom, and not too much anxiety. Formality and constraint paralyse the strokes of genius. Gray did not write enough to be at his ease. What he wrote best was composed without any decided view of publication, when his sorrow for the death of *West* vented itself in the melancholy contemplations which had dominion over his heart. He did not seek for fine thoughts, he merely poured forth those natural reflections and regrets which oppressed him; not one false or ambitious sentiment or idea is, therefore, to be found among them. But if Gray had written fifty times as much he would have been much more happy.

LETTER VI.

20th July, 1824.

I RISE with a clouded mind, but my task must be done! The wind has been high all night, the lake is agitated and stormy; and I see the spray break on the opposite shore, rising into the air like momentary white clouds: *Mont-Blanc* is entirely enveloped; neither its top nor its sides can be seen. The air is fresh, and almost cold: two days ago the heat was scarcely tolerable. It changed on Sunday about three o'clock, P.M.

When Dr. Young entitled his Satires *Love of Fame the Universal Passion*, should he not have written *Vanity the Universal Passion?* I consider vanity to be strictly this: *a desire to raise a belief in others, that we possess some recommendable quality which we know ourselves that we do not possess;* as to be thought to possess a large estate, when we know that

we have a very small one: but in common usage the word is more loosely applied, and is extended to an *ostentatious* display of what we *do* possess. It is sometimes, yet rarely, seen in great men, even in the pretension to notice for trifles. The late Lord *E.*, brilliant as he was, had this weakness; and acknowledged as the splendour of his eloquence, and the power of his professional merit was, it was an extraordinary and provoking drawback, to hear him babble petty egotisms with the most childish weakness. Thus, but with awkward instead of polished absurdity, *Goldsmith* the poet discovered his insatiate and puerile vanity. Lord *Byron* was made of sterner stuff, and more proud than vain; but even he now and then shows something of it, especially in his prose *Letter on Bowles's Strictures.* *Gray* had it in his strange fear to be considered an author, lest it should degrade his gentility. It is the weakness which puts us most in the power of others, and which exposes us to inevitable and constant mortifications. There is but one

way to be at ease under the insults and envy of the world: to rely only on what we really possess, and sternly to refrain from any sort of pretension. If a man be really a poet, neither the world's neglect nor the abuse of criticism can diminish the gift; if he be not one, yet make attempts to be thought so, then he is in the power, not only of every one who can judge, but of every one who chooses to be ill-natured.

After the most humble competence, outward circumstances have very little to do with human happiness; all depends on the discipline of the mind and the feelings. A due estimate of things, according to their degrees of value, and a superiority to the vain parade of life, puts it in the power of almost every one to enjoy as much satisfaction as the frail condition of our being will permit; and he who tasks his intellect to enforce these moral lessons is the most useful of all teachers.

The blaze of fame, the possession of genius, applause, and adulation, will confer but a very feverish and transient satisfac-

tion to him who does not regulate his own internal sensibilities, and keep his thoughts under the dominion of sound reason and sober judgment. There is a halo of false light round almost every thing in the appearances of the world, and it is a noble exertion to endeavour constantly to strip off this disguise. When we have an accurate and clear view of the real forms and characters of things, we guide our expectations with an approach to rectitude, which avoids perpetual snares; and our calmness is not disturbed by deceitful flashes, which keep an ill-informed mind in perpetual alarm and false excitement.

All the same evils prevail in literature as in practical life; the same delusive good; the same temptation to acquire hollow advantages which will end in disappointment; the same passions; the same intrigues and artifices; the same empty pretensions; and the same modes of mortifying them. Literature is only valuable for itself, for the intrinsic powers it confers, and the sound wisdom it teaches. Its factions, its ma-

nœuvres, its tricks of temporary distinction, its traps of popularity, are still more despicable than in the other affairs of life, because they come from a quarter which affects to be the school of knowledge and morality.

As we come to a late and declining age of letters, all sorts of corruption and artifice always by the natural course of things gain more and more dominion. Mutual flattery among authors who are leagued together, and mutual undertaking to make common cause of offence against all who are not included in their league, are the primary and more notorious systems of abuse. It is as vain to contend against them for the time being as against the *Holy Alliance*: the day of course will come when they will break and quarrel among themselves, for most of them privately hate each other all the while. But the public suffers itself to be led, and does not presume to have an opinion till it has learned it from a Review. To be sure there are Reviews on both sides, and all sides; and flat contradictions are as

much the result as that two and two make four. But the public does not mind this; it takes the ill-natured or the good-natured opinion, as it falls in with the party of each individual; and the author is a shuttle-cock, who falls between two combatants, unless where there is a secret treaty, which is generally the case among a few of the deepest politicians. At one time the cant-word ran againt the *Lake poets;* and then came a *tu quoque* of the *Cockney poets:* all which is very silly on both sides; but as to the public, it delights in a *cant-word,* because it not only saves thinking, but even memory.

The only mode of keeping a Review to candour and justice would be to lay down, in the outset, some clearly expressed principles in the different branches of literature, to which a perpetual reference might be made, and by which a test of the critic's fairness would be perpetually before the reader. It might then be easily seen, not only whether the application was correct, but whether the principles of judgment

were themselves admissible, and would give an opportunity to an author to appeal against the jurisdiction. For instance, if the principles of poetry on which any Review undertakes to decide were defined, it at least could not perpetually contradict itself without detection, and each separate article could not be written merely from the dictates of the private opinions, or passions, or interests, of the individual who furnishes the particular article. A man of independent mind has seldom any hand in Reviews, because articles must be framed, or cut down, or interpolated, to serve parties and interests.

What is of feeble attraction at the moment sometimes gradually gains its way upon the public mind, till it becomes a text-book; while what acquires immediate popular notice very rarely retains a reputation, and never its original value. This is demonstration, that the taste of the people is guided by something distinct from intrinsic merit. Piquancy is a main charm with the public; but piquancy, like every

false stimulus, in the end destroys itself. I hear *Gibbon*'s artificial style still commended by a few; but it is his matter which preserves him.

Depth, originality, soundness, can alone retain estimation to an author beyond the short life of fashion; for in a second age, the learned and judicious, and not the populace, pronounce a decision.

LETTER VII.

21st July, 1824.

I DO not think that, generally, much trust is to be put, in conversation: I do not mean that talkers intend to deceive; but there are few who can throw their talents, or even their memory, into this rapid mode of communicating knowledge. The understanding does not work quick enough; but the little passions work too quick, and throw shadows between the talker and his subject, which are not raised in the calmness of the closet. Few people talk unambitiously, and he who talks ambitiously seldom gives any solid information. Nothing is of value but frank and sincere opinions, and accurate, unembellished, undisguised facts. Weak minds are not bold enough for this,—ardent minds are commonly too vain.

Still a sagacious man scarce ever retires from conversation without having learned something; he gathers some hints on which he may work, and corrects his own speculations by the tone of rumours, even when they are false; he is drawn to direct his attention to points which had escaped him, by perceiving which way the current of vulgar ideas runs; and where he is not satisfied of the fidelity of what he hears, he catches enough to put him on his guard.

On the other hand, it almost always has the effect of a chill to generous hopes; it conveys a coldness to the heart, by showing every thing which ought to be high degraded by a representation of it in some point of view that destroys the magic, and impresses enthusiasm with the thought, that it will be better to go home and sleep away life in the seclusion of apathy, for that all is vanity and vapour. To retain his energies and hopes, no one ought to mix much in society and conversation. Imagination is always checked by much familiarity with the world.

I have spent a great deal of my life out of society, and I always grow sick when I have had much of it. I had rather dream away existence in speculations that cannot be realised, and visions of my own creation. I do not meet with others who have the same sanguine views of things as I have, and who see the scenery of the globe and the affections of humanity with the same ardour of romance. It has been the whole business of my life in society to keep down my feelings, and the appearance of them,—not to over-colour them; for I confess I have had the cowardice not to be proud of them, but to endeavour to make myself appear more like other people, by affecting calmness and indifference. The *nil admirari* has always been considered the great test of a man of the world; and the full consciousness of it has always made me, with a false timidity, wish to conceal how utterly opposite I was in nature and habits to this test. I never could be calm in company, though I fully appreciated the value of such a temperament, and therefore

struggled my utmost to overcome useless and irrational agitations; my nerves have been always weak, and my eye and my ear quick at scorn, sarcasm, slight, or neglect. I know not that I could ever be rude or harsh to any one who did not give me offence; but I am irritable, and when I begin am savage, and know not where to stop. Yet, in the course of my tempestuous life, I have had occasion for great self-command, and a fortitude of an extraordinary kind, to bear me up against oppression, rendered almost insurmountable by a combination of numbers, interests, passions, and treacheries. Feeble as I was, and especially ill calculated for a practical conflict with the coarseness of mankind, I have yet stood it all, never bending or bowing to the storm, my head erect above the waves, and my spirit growing with the contest. I am sure, that ninety-nine out of one hundred of those born with the stoutest hearts and firmest nerves would have sunk beneath half what I have withstood without being shaken; and I attribute my survival

to the light of imagination which enveloped me, and led me on.

I cannot detail the complicated history of these things without bringing on the stage a number of individuals, for the most part "a "tribe without a name," of whose characters and intrigues the reader would soon be tired, before a fifth, or perhaps tenth, of the stories regarding them had been gone through; and an half-told tale is injurious to all parties. It is true, that part concerns the public justice and constitution of the country; but still it is blended with so many private interests, and so many topics, against which the world in general leans with a strong prejudice, and even hatred, that I am unwilling again to open this provoking and heart-desponding field of contest, which, while it is dwelt upon, keeps indignation and wounded pride in constant ferment.

Throughout life I have endeavoured to divert my mind from vain solicitudes, by the recreating charms of various literature. I have been often censured for distracting

my attention by too much *diversity* in these pursuits: the censurers have not known how much I merited, by being able to fix my mind on any one of them. Under the circumstances in which I have been placed, change and novelty were necessary to awaken any degree of attention of a harassed and perplexed intellect and exhausted spirits, and it often happened that there remained none of the energies requisite for the nobler efforts of the mental faculties: then the drudgery of compilation, and dry facts and dates, and dull antiquarian researches, were all for which my enfeebled understanding was fit. I know not, however, that the dullest of my books have failed in bringing together useful matter; that the choice is such as could have been made by any but a literary enthusiast; or that there is any where wanting some mixture of intellect, or some indication of original and even intense thought.

I have, in the course of my anxious life, turned my considerations to many subjects, neither light nor wanting in general interest.

Whether I have treated them with good sense, soundness, and force of thought, others must judge; for it is easy for any reader of ability to see, by half-a-dozen pages, whether there is any mastery of mind in the author's treatment of a subject. When common minds undertake to handle a topic, it is a waste of labour, and an encroachment upon public attention. There is a habit of rectitude of decision which goes beyond mere reasoning, and seems to be a sort of intuitive gift. We see this prevail through the writings of one author, while it is generally wanting in those of another, who yet does not seem less plausible and less argumentative in the treatment of his subject. Of this intuitive class of authors the number is small, — at least 950 out of 1000 authors are merely artificial. An artificial author never acquires more than a temporary fame. His opinions are put into a dress which deceives; but they have no intrinsic value, and the dress wears out with time.

The cultivation of literature is almost the only mode by which a man can combine a life of retirement with a life of usefulness to others,—because his retirement is active in fruits dedicated to be enjoyed by the world; and wherever these fruits are genuine and sound, I believe that their effects, though generally allowed to be important, are vastly more extensive and deep than is supposed. The mind can only work perfectly on the toils of others by means of written registers of them, which it can digest in the closet in silence and without interruption, where the reason is in full force, where the imagination is unrestrained, and the emotions can be freely indulged, unchecked by the eye of ridicule or curiosity. Nor is it a less advantage that these are communicable to those who cannot command other society, nor otherwise enjoy the thoughts and sentiments of their fellow-beings.

Of the years I have spent abroad, I do not repent of that time which has been past in literature,—and it has been no small

portion. I wrote my *Hall of Hellingsley* principally at *Florence* and *Naples*, one chapter at *Paris*, and part of the last volume at *Geneva;* where I also wrote *Coninsby* and *Brokenhurst*, and my *Population and Riches*, my *Gnomica*, my poem of *Odo*, and my *Anti-Critic*, and where I compiled several bibliographical works.

It is not necessary to give an account of *Geneva:* no place is better known. It has been the occasional resort of the English and Scotch from the days of Queen Mary and *John Knox*, when the persecuted Protestants took refuge here. Nor was it less so to the French of the same persuasion: here *D'Aubigné* ended his days, and here the *Duke de Rohan* was buried. The scenery of the Lake, the Alps, and the Jura, is magnificent; but Lord Byron has described all these in glowing poetry, and it would be flat indeed to come after him in cold prose. These scenes continually remind us of *Voltaire*, *Rousseau*, and *Madame de Staël*, but of none so much as of Lord *Byron*. The noble poet is, however, not a

favourite with the Genevans: he mixed but little with them, and gave offence to one or two of the most distinguished persons, which soon spread itself to all their connections, friends, and acquaintance. The more distinguished Genevan families have a good deal of pride; and indeed they are of long standing, and have most of them produced men of some distinction, especially in literature: — the *Fabris, Lullins, Turretinis, Diodatis, Pietets, Tronchins, Calandrinis, Trèmbleys, &c. &c.*

LETTER VIII.

22d July, 1824.

I NEVER in actual life could pay the smallest regard to petty manners, etiquettes, and ceremonials; I will not therefore belie myself by letting my *pen* trifle with them. The difference between England and the Continent gradually ceases to strike after a long residence. There is much conformity between the English and Genevans, but still more between the *Scotch* and Genevans. The most opposition is in the dinner-hour, the dinner-table, and the time spent over it; but this is not peculiar to Geneva: it prevails over the Continent. I believe they are right; but it is long before an Englishman's inveterate habits will allow him to think so. The Genevans are willing to open their houses to the English who will pay them the requisite attention; for they love attention, and are,

I think, a little stern in exacting it. Society is also to be had at *Florence*, *Rome*, and *Naples;* but little, I suspect, at *Milan*, where few English take up their residence. Our nation, however, are very much inclined to herd by themselves, and form every little party and *coterie* of their own with a narrowness not very commendable. Part of the establishment regarded most by the English at home they neglect abroad,—their horses and equipages: things to which the *Genevans* pay little regard, but to which much attention is extended by the *Neapolitans* and *Florentines*. These form the principal expence of a Neapolitan noble, who is generally poor; but of whom the number is great, and the family commonly ancient.

There are few English families of any note who have not been to Geneva and Italy in the last six years; and he who wishes to enlarge his acquaintance, may thus do so without much difficulty. I never in my life had much ambition of a large acquaintance, and never the manners

to procure it. The effects of my original shyness, which has always been a real misfortune to me, still adhere to me; and when I think I am neglected, I am reproached with a coldness and reserve of manner, which is construed to be the most repulsive pride and contempt; and then, when I begin to be at ease, I have a frankness which is as indiscreet as my shyness is forbidding.

In truth, I have an irritation about me, which age, if it a little abates, by no means calms as it ought to do. I am apt to be too passive at first, and when roused, too violent; I cannot contradict at all, or I do it too decidedly. It never was in my nature to do any thing with moderation: I never, therefore, come out of company self-satisfied; and for this reason frequently make a resolution to avoid it, and often do decline it. The art of conversation is a rare acquirement, for it is an acquirement of great care and skill, as well as of native faculty; and they who have genius, knowledge, and eloquence, very frequently want

it. Irregular flights of momentary excellence do not make amends for fits of indiscreet warmth or moody silence, or half-digested subtleties, extravagant positions, or eccentric sentiments; for prejudices which outrage candour, or animosities which generate fear and want of faith. On the other hand, tame common-place produces an *ennui*, that dispirits the springs of action, and throws a cloud upon the colours of life.

It is vanity which is in the generality of persons the bane of all conversation: the passionate and immoderate desire to shine! It is this which sophisticates the relation of every fact, and gives a false pretence to every opinion and sentiment uttered. An ambitious talker is always fatiguing to every one but himself; and yet we do not meet with one in fifty who is not an ambitious talker. The desire to appear important in the eyes of another is an almost universal passion. The great struggle ought to be, to direct this desire of importance to proper objects, to found the claim to dis-

tinction on superiority which is of genuine dignity or use. And what so high as literary fame, where it is well deserved?

Of this, the difficulty lies, *first*, in the rarity of the native gift; *secondly*, in the due cultivation; *thirdly*, in the capricious taste of the public, which is not apt to distinguish real merit. All these lead to conversational *pretensions*, which go far to vitiate the pleasures of social intercourse.

But he who is duly qualified for literature, and who gives himself up to the pursuit, should give his daily and hourly efforts to regulate his mind in this respect. He should sternly lay down his principles, and sternly pursue them, without regard to the caprice of public opinion: if fame comes, it will be well; but if it comes not, he will still have his reward. That merit which arises from talent, steadily applied for many years to worthy subjects, seems to me absolutely certain to be duly estimated in the lapse of time. What is useful and solid may make no impression on the populace, because the populace do not read for use,

and could not judge what is useful if they did; and as far as the taste of the multitude goes, what is faulty is more likely to be attractive than what is good. And then, as the *Reviews* are got up for sale, *their* business is to flatter the public taste, not to lead it. But in due time, when the grave has closed over an author, and the sale of novelty has passed, the character of a work is determined by the opinions of the learned and the wise.

It requires, however, great strength and energy to persevere right onward under discouragement, and even without being sometimes cheered; and the common effect of want of notice, and still more of censure, is to blight genius in the bud. Yet, if it is too anxious for premature celebrity, it is almost certain to lose what would be permanent.

Much remains to be done: the subjects of literature can never be exhausted; every age presents new combinations, new topics of distinction, and calls for new applications of what are old. Even changes of manner and language require the re-casting

and re-production of the same subjects and the same materials; and the mere act of recognition becomes often expedient and necessary.

But study alone will do little in producing any of the greater fruits of literature. Materials collected, not from books, but from nature and life, are necessary: the fancy must be furnished before the imagination can create; and the heart must have been touched from without before those lively and true associations can be represented, which raise strong sympathy in the bosoms of others.

I know nothing better suited for this than foreign travel. The scenery of nature is much bolder and more sublime in any parts of the Continent than in England. It has, moreover, the advantage of novelty and freshness, at a period of life when our faculties are more fitted to take advantage of strong impressions, and when we are totally detached from those localities, which are connected with early prejudices. The Alps and the Appenines, the mountains

and lakes of Switzerland, the Mediterranean, with its islands and coasts, and especially those of the southern parts of Italy, with the Bay of Naples, and Mount Vesuvius, with its mighty volumes of smoke and fire, are ever present to one whose senses have been once capable of receiving the impression of them.

Perhaps it is to those, whose mental exertions are to be made in the department of imagination, that these acquired riches are the most valuable. Had Lord Byron's mind been only accustomed to a narrow extent of scenery, instead of what was at once most varied and most magnificent, his poetical inventions could never have possessed the splendour and sublimity which show such astonishing powers. Action and interest characterize his poetical inventions, as they characterized his life; all he writes is vivid emotion, and often burning passion. The figures come forth from the canvass, and stand embodied, with breath on their lips, and the blood trembling through their veins. The author knew by experience so

much of what he painted, that his imagination always raised something like reality.

The Italians have been the leaders in all that is affecting, lofty, and beautiful in poetry, since the revival of literature; and much of this must be attributed to climate and scenery. All the finest notes of *Milton* have their prelude in *Dante*. And as to *Petrarch*, I have never been able to find any one who bears even a faint resemblance to him in the *love-sonnet:* he has an elegant and pathetic felicity of expression quite peculiar to himself; but this is a minor merit: the expression only reflects the character of his sentiments, imagery, and thoughts. But when Petrarch was courted by princes, and residing in palaces covered with laurels, he was not half so glorious as in the humble retirement of his old age at *Arqua*, under the *Euganæan hills*. There he wrote and read from morning till night, and enjoyed his own imagination undisturbed.

To me, nothing is more surprising than that there should be any difference of opi-

nion about such poetry as that of *Petrarch* or of *Dante*. Indeed, I cannot conceive how the question of what is poetry, and what is not, can ever arise. The meaning of the word by which it is named is alone a definition: this alone proves that it must be an *invention*, or *creation*. It is, then, truth represented by an *imagined* illustration, and not by a *copy* of a particular existence; but as the object is to *please* as well as to instruct, it must be an interesting truth; that is, it must be grand, pathetic, or beautiful,—and it must be in metre! I have used the word *illustration*, because it involves the necessity of *imagery*, or *embodiment*, in opposition to what is abstract.

I feel confident, that this includes all that is essential in the definition of poetry, and that whatever comes within it must be poetry; whatever is wanting in these essentials cannot be so. I insist upon it, that all our popular English poetry ought to be tried by it; and I am sure the result will be, that a great deal of it cannot abide the

test. In much of it there is no invention; and where there *is* invention, it is not an invention which illustrates *truth;* and where there is an invention that illustrates truth, it is not a grand, pathetic, or beautiful truth.

Nothing can deeply impress the imagination that has not a sufficient air of probability to engage a momentary belief of the reader, and unless

> —"The poet's own undoubting mind
> Believes the magic wonders which he sings."

This I take to be the limit, beyond which extravagance must not go. Every thing beyond it is fantastic, childish, and revolting. What truth is illustrated by imagined instances in the greater part of modern poetry? The larger portion of poems do not even affect it: they affect to describe facts, or to *copy* the particular scenery of nature. Many of them are didactic, and describe philosophically,—not by poetical example; others, for the purpose of proving *invention*, represent *impossibilities*.

How does *this* exemplify *truth* by imagined illustrations? Is it pretended that the detached thoughts are embodied in figurative language? But the whole poem ought to be an embodiment, and the separate figures but parts of *one* whole. Similes and metaphors are but petty inventions: they are often a forced combination, — and never have a perfect unity.

Observation can never be invention, and can only be made poetry by the vivid manner of reflecting it; and then can only belong to the minor class of fancy, and not to the higher department of imagination; unless, indeed, it be illustrated by feigned characters put into action, and then it comes under the previous definition of truth illustrated by invented example.

These are truths so obvious, and so universally admitted, that they do not require to be enforced or recognized. They have, therefore, no interest in themselves when announced; and if any interest is to be found in any dress which may be put upon them, an instant impression occurs, that

what is the *principal* feature ought not to be made an *adjunct*. But it generally happens, that the metaphor is as stale as the thought, and the hope of interest is placed in the combination; but the author ought to recollect, that *two negatives cannot make an affirmative!* There is something so hypochondriacal in the effect of what is feeble, and trite, and sickly, that to me it is worse than indifferent, and is even mischievous. If it gives to weak amateurs, sentimental dandies, or love-sick girls, some puny pleasure, or the pale ghost of some flitting, shadowy, dim-discovered pleasure, let it be crowned with its golden laurels, plucked and sear as they are!

But there are those who like something of more ambitious and deeper-laid ornament, where the gold leaf is thicker and more compact, and where the image is more striking, as well as polished with a stronger hand. Though it be but a copy of all its predecessors, and no new feature, no new proportion, no new tint be given,

yet the artist's hand which joins them with so much smoothness, and so much skill, appears enchanting to those who judge by rule, rather than by feeling.

LETTER IX.

23d July, 1824.

THE six years I passed in Parliament,—1812 to 1818,—though not without their mortifications, were, perhaps, altogether, the most satisfactory of my life. They opened many new points of view to me, and occupied me practically in a manner not inconsistent with my former pursuits and habits of mind. In this station one is, or imagines one's self, nearer the source of action; and the opportunity of a closer inspection of public characters affords subjects of interesting observation, while the manner in which they to whom the management of affairs of state is committed exhibit talents, knowledge, or skill, teaches us practically how the world is governed. Constituted as London is, which is filled with an overgrown mass of miscellaneous population,

the legislative function gives an opening in society, without which an individual, not of bustling and obtrusive manners, is likely to be buried and lost in society: here what is most actively eminent is commonly concentrated, though it must be admitted that it grows less so every day.

What first and most struck me in the House of Commons, was the extreme rarity, not only of great and eloquent speakers, but even of moderately good ones, and the number of those whose delivery was not only bad but execrable. *Canning* was the only one who could be said to speak with a polished eloquence; and he did not then speak often, and his speeches were at that time too much studied. Of the other speakers who took the lead, where the matter was good there were many natural or technical defects: the accent was national, provincial, professional, or inelegant; or the voice was bad, or the language clumsy. Three of the most extraordinary have gone to their graves, by one singular and lamented destiny. *Whitbread* improved

as a speaker, to the last: he was a man of strong head, always well informed, generally ingenious, sometimes subtle, occasionally eloquent, but not naturally of a delicate taste and classical sensibility. He was almost always too violent, and sometimes tumid: his person was coarse and ungraceful, and his voice seldom melodious; and the whole of his manner betrayed too much of labour and art. He began too high, and soon ran himself out of breath.

Sir *Samuel Romilly* was a very effective speaker on the topics which he handled: he was a most acute reasoner,—of extraordinary penetration and subtlety,—with occasional appeals to sentiment, and addresses to the heart; but still his manner was strictly professional, (which is never a popular manner in parliament,) and it had also something of a Puritan tone, which, with a grave, worn, pallid, puritanic visage and attitude, took off from the impression of a perfect orator, though it never operated to diminish the great attention and respect with which he was heard. The vener-

ation for his character, the admiration of him as a profound lawyer, the confidence in the integrity of his principles, and his enlightened, as well as conscientious study of the principles of the constitution of his country, procured for all he said the most submissive attention; and they who thought him in politics a stern and bigotted republican, whose opinions were uncongenial to the mixed government of Great Britain, and therefore dissented *toto corde* from his positions, deductions, and general views of legislation and of state, never dared to treat lightly whatever came from his lips. He had a cold reserved manner, which repelled intimacy and familiarity; and, therefore, whatever he did, he did by his own sole strength.

Lord *Castlereagh* belonged to a different order, and was cast in a very opposite mould. He had a most prepossessing air; and was, in manner, by far the most perfect gentleman I have ever seen. He had led an active and stormy life; and his abilities were at last tried beyond their strength, and be-

yond the strength of any mind. He was, in general, not a good speaker; sometimes even a bad one: but once or twice I have heard him, in the department of strength and manliness, speak better than any man in the House. I attribute, therefore, his general habit of confusion mainly to a want of self-confidence; for the times of success to which I allude were on his first return from the Continent in the summer of 1814, on concluding the peace, when he was greeted on his entry into the House by the universal cheers of all parties. This of course elevated his spirits, and he then spake with the most unembarrassed fluency and vigour. He was not a popular minister; and I firmly believe that this conviction hung, in common, a heavy weight upon his faculties. His abilities were, unquestionably, most ignorantly and absurdly under-rated; and when once accident makes a man a butt for the witlings who pander for his opponents, it spreads a contagion through the light heads and hearts of the populace, which it is difficult to resist. An

epigrammatist, having got his cue, goes on hammering his brains, year after year, upon one string; and if he can but have his jest and his point, and the applause of ingenuity for a clever distich, cares not for truth or justice, or how many poisoned daggers he fixes in the heart of another. Lord Castlereagh was laborious and well informed; perhaps he was not quick enough to master all the various points which forced themselves upon his attention; and he had not that sort of convenient ingenuity, which enables a man to skim the surface in such a manner as to disguise ignorance. He was apt sometimes to penetrate a little, when he had neither strength to go through, nor to extricate himself. He had had a great rise; but yet in no degree such as many of those on whom none of the odium which attended him fell. His mother was a *Conway* of the highest English nobility; his father's family had for some generations enjoyed wealth. His father's mother was the daughter of an East-India governor, of immense riches for those days. At the time of the

marriage of Lord Castlereagh's mother, her father, the Earl of Hertford, was Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland; and Lord Castlereagh was brought up in England among the Seymours; and Lord Orford's letters will prove that he gave early indications of great talents. I never met with a man of less haughty and more conciliatory manners than Lord Castlereagh. I have encountered, and I suppose most persons have encountered, men, thinking themselves great, who have appeared as if they could not see one, as if one was covered with an invisible cloak, and was to them as if one did not exist; so lofty were their optics, and so high they carried their nose and chin; and yet these were not men of noble blood, high pretensions, and invested with high functions like Lord Castlereagh; men perhaps of some talent, but who seemed to think themselves gifted with an absolute *monopoly* of genius and talent. I do not think such men fit to govern the complicated machine of state, however they may excel in some single faculty.

George Ponsonby was a very indifferent speaker, though he was put at the head of a party, and had been Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Perhaps he was worn out at this time, though not sixty; for his knowledge was scanty, his ideas were few, and he always treated a subject in a strangely narrow and detached manner, as if his whole ambition was confined to a few epigrammatic remarks.

Francis Horner was a rising speaker, when he was taken off in the flower of his age. He was calm, rational, strong, and so argumentative and clear, as to fix the attention, and carry with him very frequently the conviction of a part of his audience against their will; yet he never rose to eloquence, and had always something of a professional manner.

The manner of *Wilberforce* had a little too much of the pulpit. His voice was weak and shrill; and his person extremely unfavourable. But he had the prudence to speak seldom except on great topics, on which his opinions and arguments were,

from the habits of his life, extremely desirable to be known by the public.

Old *George Rose* spoke in a gossipping, garrulous manner, and never had the good luck to carry much weight with him; while his knowledge of details was always suspected of some party purpose.

Tierney made his way by a fund of subtle humour and drollery peculiar to himself, which caused him to be listened to, not only without fatigue, but with eagerness and pleasure.

The tone of *Brougham*'s oratory is still in such daily exercise, that it is unnecessary to particularise it. It is often powerful, sometimes irresistible; but sometimes deals too much in exaggeration, and sometimes in verbiage. Its sarcasm and irony is not easily withstood. The accentuation is sometimes peculiar, half Westmoreland and half Scotch; and he never loses the tone, expressions, and air of an advocate.

Sir *James Mackintosh*'s matter and language are admirable; but his voice is weak

and unmusical, and his pronunciation retains a great deal of his Scotch birth.

Peel is a clear, well-arranged, intelligent, and able speaker on points of business; but his voice is a little affected, and almost always tends to a whine.

The present *Chancellor of the Exchequer* did not, at the time of which I am speaking, hold this important office. He then spoke seldom; but when he did rise, he always spoke with liveliness, talent, vigour, knowledge, and sound sense, and with an extraordinary appearance of gentlemanly and honourable feeling.

It is said that lawyers make bad speakers in Parliament; yet it must be observed, that most of the persons here named were brought up to the bar.

While I sat in this House, I made great efforts to amend the *Poor Laws;* nor did I take less pains to get the cruel and unjust provisions of the *Copyright Act* altered. I was not successful; but in both cases I had powerful and overwhelming parties to contend with. In the first, all the manu-

facturing towns, and all towns; in the second, the universities of the three kingdoms, and all their members. *Now*, when I contemplate the subject coolly, I wonder that I made the little progress which I did. I was in my fiftieth year when I took my seat, and this is much too late to indulge the hope of becoming a parliamentary speaker of any power. I did my best; but I rose very seldom, for my nerves were not strong enough to enable me to retain my self-possession, and bring together my ideas with sufficient strength and clearness to do justice to them. I have no reason to complain of want of candour here, for I was treated with quite as much candour as I deserved. Indeed, had I had as fair usage in the rest of my days as in parliament, I should be unjust to be discontented with mankind, or with my lot in life. The gloom and plaintiveness of which I am accused would never then have been the inmates of my bosom. I witnessed slights, and jealousies, and rudenesses, even there;

but such are the inevitable attendants of our human lot.

There is much fatigue in attending strictly the multitudinous business of the House; and the late debates, prolonged till long after midnight, are often very wearisome; and the return home through the night-air, when the House, which is not large enough to hold conveniently all its members, has been crowded and hot, is very trying to the health.

To encounter many things that depress, and many that disgust, is no more than must happen to us all, however we occupy ourselves. It is the same in private business, in literature, in pleasures:—every where intrigue, envy, jealousy, selfishness, corruption; every where combination and faction; every where quackery and charlatanism; every where pretension:—no where simple strength and solid merit. But they who have not boroughs must engage in popular elections; and what fortune is secure against the costs of popular elections? Who are fitted for the solicitude, the

suppleness, the caprices, the insults, of a popular canvass? It is said, that men of genius and high abilities do not make men of business: this is true of the details; but in a legislative assembly, men of genius and originating minds ought to be intermixed in their due proportions. It is true, that government may not want such minds among them: they merely want a silent vote, and do not choose the interference or management of any measures but their own. It has been remarked, that no one can do any thing in parliament individually, and unconnected with the movements and technical arrangements of a party: what is done can only be carried, even through the early stages, by combination,—and parliamentary tactics are as necessary as the tactics of war. Inexperienced members get up, and make motions, and are led on by sanguine hope; but zeal, energy, and exertion, waste away with time; speakers of a subordinate power or success, who have commenced busily, gradually languish, and then lapse into silence. There are

men who have sat in many parliaments, and gone through the routine with such silent mechanism, that their very persons are scarcely known to ten members of the House. I have seen men come into committee-rooms, with whom others sitting on the committees have sat for ten years, yet on their entry have not recognised them to be members. For my part, though I knew the persons of a large part of the House, still there were many whom I did not know.

How many have since gone to their graves, and several with whom I had daily intercourse; how many have withdrawn from parliament, and betaken themselves to the shades of retirement, from the busy scenes where we used to forget, in the pressure of public business, our private cares and anxieties; where the day still brought with it some new excitement, and wholesome fatigue brought on the sound sleep from which we rose refreshed on the morrow! To deep sorrow, and the constant presence of the ghost of past injustice, how

pleasant is the distraction of the images of crowded cities, and gentle occupation.

The parliament which succeeded that in which I sat only lived a year, and then was dissolved by the King's death, in the spring of 1820. I was then at *Florence*, confined to a sofa, and I believe dangerously ill. During all the proceedings about the Queen, which took place soon afterwards, I was at *Naples*. I was glad that I was out of the way of that most painful and harrowing question. Indeed, of all the climates and scenery in the world, the most delightful is that of Naples. It is supposed to be insufferably hot, but the sea-breezes counteract the inconvenience of the heat. The distance from England is, however, a great difficulty in matters of business. The post never brought a letter under *nineteen* days, and seldom in less than twenty-one; so that it generally took seven weeks before an answer was received.

LETTER X.

24th July, 1824.

SCORN is the charge commonly made against genius, and especially against Lord Byron; but when mankind pay so little regard to the *dignity* of moral truth, and so little to what is dignified in things indifferent to moral truth, it is scarce possible for genius to refrain from scorn; nor am I sure that it is desirable, or that it would not take something from that grandeur and due sensibility which ought to characterise genius. It is not merely that the passions of society in general are so vicious, but that they are so *mean*: it is this which excites indignation. They estimate things by such pitiful tests, and have so little feeling for the intellectual excellences by which our human being is raised in the scale of the creation, that the man of high mental faculties, who is un-

touched by a haughty anger at the observation, is without a heart. It will be answered, that he who has frailties of his own cannot justify scorn towards others. This assumes, that there are no gradations of fault, and that scorn is only for the *perfect*. Then scorn must not exist except with the Creator of All.

Every day and hour a great mind encounters objects of scorn. To see the vile adulation paid to wealth, even when it has been notoriously acquired by the basest means,—is not this a fit object of it? To see how ancient, illustrious, and virtuous families, are trod in the dust by new, obtrusive, and reckless ambition,—is not this a fit object of it? To see the quackery and intrigues by which *pretended* genius carries away all the laurels from that which is *genuine*,—is not this the same? To see the insolent abuse of power, and impertinence of office, or the licentiousness that disguises itself in the mantle of sacred liberty, — are not these the same? To see artifice, manœuvre, corruption, prevail every where,

instead of worth and strength; to see words overcome deeds, and hypocrisy supplant virtue; to see frankness always sacrificed, and deception uniformly successful, — are not these fit objects of scorn?

There are men whose intellects and bosoms are hard, or subtle enough, boldly to answer *No* to all these questions, and who are ready, with a long tirade of common-place positions and arguments, to justify them. I shall merely glance at a few of them. The first is, that riches are *entitled* to the dazzling influence which they hold in society; and that the enquiry into the mode by which they are got is one with which the public have nothing to do; that commerce is the soul of life, and that in traffic all is fair: all which, independent of other objections, absurdly assumes that riches are only got by commerce. The second is, that all lustre of family beyond power and property is illegitimate, empty, and imaginary. The third is, that popularity is the test of genius. The fourth is, that the charge of abuse of power arises from an

envious hatred of greatness, and a perverse dislike to authority; and that the charge of licentiousness equally springs from a mean and bigoted enmity to rational liberty. The fifth, that a just pliancy and obliging attention to the habits and practices of life, and the unalterable characters of mankind, is called corrupt subservience and artifice; that sweetness of manner is as necessary as integrity of act; that frankness of confession does not make that right, which is in itself wrong; and that where there cannot be virtue, there ought at least to be decorum.

But it is the abuse of the application of all these positions which mainly excites the scorn of high-minded genius. Used as they are, they are for the most part (to borrow the words of Thomson in his *Castle of Indolence*) "scoundrel maxims."

It is said that we ought to take the world as it is, and not set ourselves up to deal in reform or indignation; that we clothe ourselves with a strange self-sufficiency, if we suppose that we can amend it, or judge better than others what is right or expe-

dient; that we are not the makers of mankind, and that we cannot know better than Providence what is best for us. If this be true, whatever course the multitude, or its leaders, choose to take, they must be left to themselves; nothing is to be done by human wisdom, or human effort; the wise are not wise; there is nothing in superiority of intellect; and the concurrence of numbers is the proof of what is best.

But why should not human beings be sent into the world with different mental capacities, and different powers of estimating good and evil? And are they not in fact so sent? If some are endowed with a higher order of spirit or soul than others, can they avoid to scorn the miserable and groveling apprehensions and passions of inferior spirits? Can they view their mean pursuits, their coarse opinions, their vulgar sentiments, their selfish and treacherous conduct to each other, without anger or contempt? Can they lose themselves in gazing on visions of high and intense affection struggling with the cruelty of worldly

turpitude, and not break out in frenzies of eloquent disdain and resentment? Can they look upon the loveliness of the creation, debased by man's fallen and sensual nature, and not sink into melancholy, gloom, bitterness, and despondence? But it may be asked, "If grave indignation and bitter "complaint be thus accounted for, why ri- "dicule also?" Can it not be recollected, that there has been sometimes mention of

"——— Moody madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe?"

Could this world be such as noble poets make it, and such as the imagination forms it in its voluntary dreams, it would be a paradise. But it is deformed by wilful vice, and made a wilderness of misfortune and sorrow, as well as of baseness. They who are conversant with this more elevated sphere of enjoyment live in a state of irritation with the mass of society; and when they are not lost in their own creations, are angry, moody, and indignant.

They are accused of not living as other people live; of eccentricities, seclusions, an-

tipathies, neglects, imprudences, ill-assorted friendships, and ill-placed faiths. It must be remembered, that they often judge of mankind as they ought to be, often are driven into irregularities by outrageous disappointment, and are often made by despair insensible to all common cautions. If a great General were to form skilful and profound plans of a campaign, and were afterwards defeated by the defaults of his commanders of divisions, and those under them, would it impeach the wisdom of the General, or of his plans? If despondence at this failure should affect his mind, and make him neglectful of the world and careless of himself, does he not deserve pity rather than reproach? and are not his irregularities to be overlooked and forgiven?

If the powers of a genius are sometimes too high, and too refined for the materials he has to work upon, shall we put a dull man in his place? I do not believe that there ever yet existed a person of those habits of mental intensity and abstraction, and those deep sensibilities of the heart,

whence spring the fruits of genius, whose habits, passions, sentiments, and thoughts, could conform on common occasions with those of the ordinary and general members of society. One might as well expect, that one could continue to live alternately in the same day in the atmosphere of the south and the north without inconvenience or loss of health.

These positions are generally true; I only refer to Lord *Byron* as a recent and particularly striking instance. I do not say that *all* his eccentricities are justified by what has been here urged. He had, no doubt, great faults, and even vices; which were, however, redeemed by great virtues. But I persevere, most soberly, in the assertion, that *many* of the traits and habits most blamed in his character proceeded from this source, and could be no more separated from his genius than the thunder can be separated from the lightning.

This assumes what I would venture to call *a sincerity of genius*, and which I con-

tend to be the *only true* genius. I have often endeavoured to impress this distinction on various occasions: I will now say something more of it. I mean a genius which deals in the pictures of impressions which have a strong and involuntary dominion over it; impressions which are intertwined with its intellectual nature, and form a part of its being; which give a colour to its passions, and receive back a colour from them; which form part of its daily occupations, and throw out a halo through which it views every object; which are not momentary and adscititious inventions of whim or ambition, but intrinsic and inseparable from its conformation. Now all *artificial* genius is the reverse of this, all its combinations and feelings are forced; it constructs by rule, and assumes emotions which are rather imitated than experienced; there is nothing of freshness, of nature, or of life in them; they are worked up for the occasion by effort, and by the ingenuity of the head unconnected with the sympathy of the heart.

Men of this sort of artificial genius may easily accommodate themselves to the ordinary habits of society. They have no decided feelings of their own, which may operate as impediments to this sort of accommodation.

LETTER XI.

25th July, 1824.

IT has always appeared to me, that criticism has crushed genius in innumerable instances, and that it has scarce ever improved or corrected it. It has sometimes (not often) silenced mediocrity or absurdity, but what is the great good of this? Mediocrity and absurdity will soon die of themselves. But genius will not be controuled, it must go its own way, or not go at all; nature teaches it that way; rules of art confound it. Criticism may sometimes perceive what is wrong, but it never knows how to make it right; the movements and associations of genius are too subtle and spiritual for art to follow.

But there is an unhappy sensitiveness in genius, which in early life is easily blighted; which, conscious of its own weaknesses, and feeling with too morbid a mortification how

far its execution and expression falls short of the internal splendours which it experiences, is apt to be paralysed by censure, however tasteless and unjust; and to fall into languor, idleness, and despondence.

This is the more to be lamented, because in the degree in which the genius is great, the first efforts bear no proportion to the last; and, therefore, to discourage commencements, even where they are not of primary intrinsic worth, is to destroy fruits in their seed, and extinguish the sources of life. It was only by a life of labour, practice, self-confidence, and gradual power, operating on native genius, that MILTON could at last produce *Paradise Lost*. The trust in the virtue of those transcendent gifts of invention and sublimity which Providence had bestowed on him beyond other men, could alone carry him forward in that stupendous work. Had any thing occurred to lessen his self-estimation with regard to these faculties, he would have lost the energies necessary to carry him through the exertions by which his strength and

skill were brought to their height. It is a weak plant which is of quick growth, and early arrives at its full bloom.

Let any one watch closely the progress of his own mind; and, if he has any skill, observe by what slow gradations he has arrived at it. Step by step the regions of the mind open to us; we distinguish object after object, trace its outline, make out its details, and discriminate its colours and tints; and thus, by degrees, we compare, arrange, and find language for our perceptions.

When, therefore, a genius has been nipped in the bud, no one can guess at what he might have arrived, had he met with due encouragement. When men commence their career at a mature age, and still are weak or very faulty, there is little hope.

There are those who will say, that courage and perseverance are the necessary concomitants of genius; and that he, who has not these, wants an essential of genius itself. But it is not so; there is a morbid sensibility not inconsistent with the highest

genius, though often very oppressive and injurious to it. The energy that springs from attack, the strength that grows in proportion as it is opposed, is no doubt more noble; but scarce any one at first knows his own resources of vigour and power. I do not believe that Lord Byron knew them; but the irritation of his daring temper for once was a happy substitute: he sallied forth on his attackers, and his enterprising heroism carried the day. It was not skill; for I deny that there was much skill in his famous *Satire:* it is not well written; there is scarce any originality, and not much vigour in it; the cast of language and versification is every where an echo of his predecessors. If, therefore, he had judged of himself severely, the discouragement of others might have confirmed him in despair.

It was long afterwards that by perseverance he arrived at the point where his strength lay. The sun of public favour at length drew his genius into a blaze; it was

about 1813, or early in 1814, that his own native powers burst forth.

It is clear, then, that persons of the strongest original genius do not always show originality at first; they are afraid to go alone, even when they have the power to do so, and imitate for safety's sake.

But when genius puts forth early fruit, inferior as that fruit must necessarily be in mellowness and force, to what its riper age duly cultivated will be capable of producing, it may happen to give tests of future excellence, which sagacious criticism joined to candour cannot mistake. It may show such approaches to originality; so many marks of intense mental activity; such a struggle of genuine feelings; such a rectitude in the direction and manner of thought; such a vigour and propriety of language, as an accurate and penetrating judgment cannot doubt to be proofs of those capacities, which, by continued exertions and progressive strength, may arrive at last at extraordinary splendour.

Yet this is not the way in which mercenary and heartless criticism acts. It regards not age or circumstances; it assumes hard rules, which are either wrong or wrongly applied; it takes all that is new to be original, and nothing to be original that is not new; it always mistakes extravagance for invention, and truth for triteness; the modest and evanescent graces which are beyond the reach of art escape its notice; and as it is itself made up of artifice, so according to the amount of artifice does it decide the amount of merit: it cannot estimate what is natural; it has no sympathy with it. It has been called by the impulse of nature to its own task; it is, therefore, anxious to persuade the world that there is no worth or use but in technical skill.

Such are among the chances of premature failure and suppression which genius has to encounter. It may be bestowed without the added gifts of courage and confidence, but without courage and confidence it can-

not go on and make its way in the world: all the minor members of literature are against it, and all the envy and jealousy of the world, as well as its ignorance and its bad taste.

Genius blighted is not merely a gift turned to a cypher; it is disease; its vigourous faculties driven inward, and without a vent, breed all maladies; discontent, gloom, and low spirits, are sure to follow; and the talents which might have enlightened the world are lost to society, and a misery to the possessor.

Perhaps it may be said, that genius, being intrinsic, cannot be destroyed or altered by the ingratitude or neglect of others. But the fruit that is nipped in the bud never becomes fruit; it exists not even with him from whom it might have come. Labour and skill must bring forth; persevering energy must conduct to the moment of birth.

There are those who contend that praise and encouragement beget carelessness, and

that severity is a wholesome discipline. It is probable, that unmerited or extravagant praise may overset the light abilities which have more of pretension than of substance; but when solid genius exerts itself at all, it will, from its native tendencies, go on in the right paths; and it cannot labour without improving itself, and being at the same time useful to others. It is its inactivity and idleness which is to be dreaded; whatever gives it movement by just acceptation of its services is sure to educe benefit both to itself and the public.

But no man ever yet worked with all his ardour in literary composition, where the results were not to be known beyond himself; never yet was the author who did not look to the cheers of others. Take away this hope, and who will confine himself to retirement, abstraction, and lonely toil? Give an author ridicule for praise, and insult for thanks, and who will not plunge into the light and frivolous amuse-

ments of society? When mischief is made a ground of distinction, and vicious gaiety made fame, who will bind himself to that which is irksome in the act, and degrading in the consequence?

LETTER XII.

26th July, 1824.

I HAVE seen, at least, two generations of literati (principally poetical) pass away, and at least two more spring up. I do not allow (of course) quite thirty years to a generation. The first was the generation of *Johnson* and his contemporaries,—the *Wartons*, Mrs. *Carter*, Bishop *Warburton*, Lord *Orford*, *Mason*, *Robertson*, *Hurd*, *Burke*, *Reynolds*, *Glover*, *Soame Jenyns*, *W. Whitehead*, *R. O. Cambridge*, *Beattie*, *Cumberland*, *Gibbon*, Bishop *Percy*, &c. &c. Then came *Jones*, *Cowper*, *Darwin*, *Burns*, Miss *Seward*, Mrs. *C. Smith*, *Hayley*, *Maurice*, *Lofft*, *Jerningham*, *Sheridan*, *Combe*, *Aikin*, *Wolcot*, *Hurdis*, *R. P. Knight*, *Anstey*, *Jephson*, *Mickle*, *Wakefield*, *Porson*, &c. &c. Of those who have since sprung up, the first I allude to are *Wordsworth*, *Southey*, *Coleridge*, *Campbell*,

Moore, Scott, &c.; with a few more already dead, as *Leyden, Grahame, Bloomfield, H. K. White,* &c.; the second, that late generation, of which the chief, Lord *Byron,* is already dead in the splendour of his glory, with two of those who waited on his brightness, *Shelley* and *Keats.*

I do not call them *schools;* they were not, except in particular cases, parties attached to a leader. The first was a very illustrious generation, of great acquirements and solid genius. Almost all of them died between 1784 and 1800; *Warburton,* a little earlier. I remember well the death of *Johnson,* and what an impression it made on the public; nothing has occurred like it, till the death of one very unlike him, but of much more transcendent genius,— the blazing meteor, Lord *Byron.*

But *Johnson* was a very great man; — a profound and eloquent moralist, a sagacious, discriminative, and elegant biographer, and an original, solid, and penetrating critic; though, sometimes, in light cases, a little capricious and humorsome. In that part

of his *Lives of the English Poets,* which has no concern with his contemporaries, his taste is generally as sure as his observations are ingenious and deep, his disquisitions powerful, his distinctions acute and new, and his knowledge of life surprisingly piercing and just. His masterly developement of principles; the order, clearness, and force of his mind; the readiness and aptitude of his applications; the strength of his argumentative powers; and the severe integrity of his judgment; have made the matter of those lives such a standard of wisdom, such a thick-woven web of golden ore, that nothing can break it, compete with it, or diminish its value. It is true, that Johnson had, through life, more exercised his reason than his imagination; and that his feelings, if deep, were not quick, delicate, or tender. If he was a powerful scholar, he was not a very nice one; he was not sensible to the finer and more exquisite beauties of classical composition; he had none of the more minutely tremulous perceptions, none of that ineffable sensibility to the most happy

touches of perfect art in finished poetry, as he had none of the imaginative melancholy which belonged to *Gray*. But then he was never led to be falsely fastidious; the manliness and rectitude of his opinions and decisions were founded on universal intellect and universal nature. His thoughts are all his own; every thing has passed through the sieve of his own mind. Nothing in all the criticism of the world was ever written more profound, more just, more vigorous, or more eloquent, than that which he has given on *Paradise Lost*. Nothing so new, so acute, so exquisitely happy, as that on *metaphysical poetry*. He could hardly be called a poet himself, except in one of its humblest branches,—*satire*. Yet he could write poetically in prose,—witness many passages in his *Tour to the Hebrides*, and in his *Rasselas*.

I remember the strong impression which his latter volumes made upon me on their first appearance. I was then resident at *Cambridge* (1781): the biographer's slights of my two favourites, *Collins* and *Gray*,

made me so angry and indignant, that very many years passed before I could reconcile myself to the critic, or give him credit for the parts of his work which were so admirable; I thought that he discouraged *imagination* too much, and was too fond of abstract morality in rhyme. And, no doubt, this was his natural taste, wherever he did not task his judgment and gigantic understanding. The flights of imagination gave him no original unstudied pleasure, and he did not relish any indulgence of this faculty, except where it fell in with certain superstitions of his mind which he could never conquer.

There was a sobriety in the mental colours of the literati of that generation which the younger set, born or started into notice since the French Revolution, consider to be *tameness*. To those who have been used to strong colours, whatever is more chastised will appear tame. They who are accustomed to extravagance must necessarily consider that which goes to the utmost fervor which pure taste will permit to be

tame. He who had been used to gaze with pleasure on the glaring pictures of *De Loutherbourg* would call and think the soft colours of *Guido* and *Claude* very tame. To him who is habituated to the mysteries and wonders of the German school, *Otway*, and even *Shakspeare*, are tame. But the history of the literature of all countries, from its earliest day to this time, proves that *extravagance* never continued to please successive generations. It cannot: it is the novelty that delights, and novelty *must* be *short-lived!* No fruit of genius can be good, in which *reason* does not take a part; and where reason is, there cannot be extravagance.

'All classical models have been rejected by the younger schools, the schools which have arisen since this new æra; and a regard to this standard has been considered servility and prejudice. But I firmly believe, that every deviation from it will sink into obscurity as soon as the novelty is past. It cannot endure: what is not after the model of nature cannot continue to please.

It always will be so, that the indulgence of some one faculty, when it is powerful, at the expence of the rest, leads to striking effects; but it is the monstrosity that strikes. Sobriety is not tameness, and chastised thoughts are the only ones which are really beautiful: there is nothing taken single which does not soon tire; it is the mixture and contrast of colours which makes a rich picture; and this principle forms the subject of *Gray*'s magnificent Fragment under the name of *Vicissitude*, and which I consider to have some of the most perfect stanzas of uninspired poetry, both in matter and expression, with which I am acquainted. The second stanza, "Yesterday the sullen year," is also one of the most original passages in all known poetry. Now if this be genuine poetry, I cannot conceive how the greater part of what comes from the modern schools can be genuine also: upon *their* principles, it must want genius, invention, warmth of colouring; it must be the insipid formal labour of a stupid age, before light had broke in

upon the world: when the delightful and splendid freaks of imagination were extinguished by the chill of rules and models. But there is no true imagination in what the mind cannot believe, in what it knows to be false. Admitting, sometimes, that there may be a little amusement in the ingenious *whims* of imagination, it is *mere* amusement; and no more to be compared with the imaginative imbodiment of truth, than gaudy but sterile flowers are to be compared with the bloom that is followed by fruit.

The ideas of perfectibility and superior enlightenment, which the youthful generation indulge, are the bane of the age, and generate a poison which saps the root of wisdom, as well as of good taste.

LETTER XIII.

27th July, 1824.

THERE is a word constantly on the lips of society, of which, though it is not in itself so, the use and application subjects it to the name of a *cant word.* I mean the word *clever,* especially applied to literary things. Every thing now must be *clever;* that is, piquant, pointed, epigrammatic. This is a vicious taste, which has notoriously always attended a late and declining age of literature. But so far are our critical censors from discouraging it, that all the popular Reviews are themselves written on the express principle. One instruction is given by the manager to all hands employed, which must be indispensably obeyed: "The "article must be well dressed up; terse, "lively, and striking!" No matter, whether just or unjust; if smart, it will be well; if witty, it will be better still! The

rule is, never to reply; so that silence, if attacked, will be no proof that the critic is wrong; and he has nothing to do but to look dignified, and keep an oracular reserve! All the force is derived from speaking in a mask, and from behind a curtain!

Edward Phillips calls EPIGRAM *the fag-end of poetry;* and we were always taught at school to consider *Martial* in the meanest class of genius; but it is always found, even among boys, to be the taste of those who have sharp practical understandings, and are adapted to the collision of society.

There is no reason why a good thing should not be told in the most effective mode. But all literature, and all experience, prove that the worth and integrity of the *matter* is always sacrificed, where there is this sort of attention to the *manner.* Truth is never regarded, nor the genuineness of the ore, which is worked into these artful shapes. An inferior class of literati are thus brought forward, and given a sway which ought not to belong to them,—and men of the world are substituted for men

of genius. These may be *clever* men, men of quick abilities, and lively adroit use of their abilities, but this does not constitute genius. *Sheridan* was a man of most extraordinary *cleverness* and pointed wit; what proof has he left of his *genius?*

It is the MATTER which is the test of genius; its originality, force, grandeur, grace, tenderness, and, above all, its truth. MANNER is, for the most part, artifice, and ingenious labour. They with whom manner prevails over matter are heartless; they are mere actors, writing or talking for applause, *ad captandum vulgus.* Let a *clever* man take any book, however profound, however rich in materials, and however clearly, unaffectedly, and properly expressed, and how very easy it will be for him, by partial extracts, distorted combinations, and perverse commentaries, exhibited with the intermixture of a little wit and drollery conveyed in piquant terms, to seem to the common reader to have gained a contemptuous superiority both over the talents and the knowledge of his author. If complaint

is made, the answer is, "O, he did not "mean any harm; he only meant to have "his fun out, and produce an article that "would sell."

I think either Dryden or Pope says of Lord Dorset, that he was

"The best good man with the worst-natured muse."

This is but the common description of all wits: they indulge in satire out of mere good-natured gaiety; that is, they have no feeling at all,—and their good nature is but pure want of feeling.

It is said of lawyers, that from advocating causes on *every* side, they have no opinions or convictions on *any*. It is just the same of wits and clever men; they have no opinions and convictions; they assume for the moment any which may furnish them with a witticism. A true genius is under the despotic dominion of his impressions and convictions. It is his matter, not his manner, the result at which he comes, rather than his mode of putting it, which is the grand source of his power.

The mere clever man is only a word-dealer, a skilful gladiator in language. Pope speaks of those

"Who snatch a grace beyond the reach of art."

Thus it is that genius arrives at conclusions, not by ordinary processes, but by glances which cold reason cannot trace, nor cleverness follow; and which are acknowledged by the sincere and unsophisticated bosom, in defiance of all the subtle objections, and all the ludicrous cavils, which wit can point against them. Falsehood, in all its multiplied forms, swims at first on the surface of public opinion, in common with truth, and seems to show more life and activity; but it gradually sinks, widely spread and vigorous as it appeared for a time, and leaves truth in all its buoyancy unmingled, uncontaminated, and uninterrupted.

Genius may sometimes, at moments of real irritation, indulge in wit, epigram, and sarcasm; but it never interferes with its own enthusiasms, it never sacrifices truth

to a jest. The *dictæ* of a man of genius and sincerity are invaluable; the arguments of a wit only shine to lead astray: we may have been exhilarated for a moment, but we quit them abased and comfortless as if nothing was fixed, and as if wisdom and truth were but empty names.

A real genius always touches the heart as well as the head; if the heart does not make responses, if the understanding only is overcome or pleased, then it is ability only, and not genius, from which the work comes. The response of the heart is the proof of the sincerity of the mover. A valuable truth can never want the meretricious dress of wit to set it off; this dress is a strong presumption of the falsehood of what it covers.

There are intellects which seem able to accompany the greatest genius, but which do not seem able to move an inch beyond or without it; which seem borne on the stream of air created by the wave of its wings; but which would drop dead the moment they were withdrawn, or should

cease to move. These derivative powers appear plausible to the vulgar, but they are worth nothing, except to the possessor.

There is, perhaps, after all, a distinction very generally felt about what is the fruit of genius, but which no one can satisfactorily develope. It is a something which penetrates to the inmost chords of the bosom; — a something inexpressible, which electrifies and thrills through all the veins; but which, if we examine into its source with microscopic attention, we cannot exactly define. If it be the result of impressions exclusively communicated by some higher cause to those so endowed, then it may be asked, how the sympathy it awakens is so instantaneous, and so general? But if the mind of the reader be the mirror acted upon, and not the actor, then it is in the nature of a mirror to reflect what it cannot create; and there are certain things which it may be formed by nature to reflect with more readiness than others.

So it is, that art can never arrive at the creation of these impressions which are the

daily work of genius. It imitates the outward signs, sometimes with much happiness, but it can never give the breath of life. If genius consisted in strong colouring, it would often be admirable, as a glaring picture always outdoes the sober and chaste tints of nature; but the mellowness, the sobriety, the chastised hues, are the very tests of reality. All imitators caricature: it is the simplicity, the unforced, unadorned strength, which proves the native inspiration. Every effort, every mark of technical skill, puts an end to the charm, and shows the machinery of human means and artificial contrivance. Genius is a sort of oracle which stands between us and many of the mysteries of nature, and forms the communicating link. He who attempts to mimic it becomes odious and absurd by his presumptuous affectation.

LETTER XIV.

28th July, 1824.

THERE is something so perverse in our human destiny, that it seldom happens that the attainment of our desires satisfies us, even when they are rational. We wish for honourable fame, it seldom comes; but if it comes, we find scarce any enjoyment in it; it turns out to be a shadow. The absence of it is a grief, its presence is no happiness.

It does not always fall on those who deserve it; witness *Milton*, who was very little noticed, and still less praised by his contemporaries; a neglect for which it is idle to attempt to account, by ascribing it to the prejudices entertained against his *political* character, because, till the restoration, his politics would have recommended, not depressed, him; and yet the neglect of his poetry was always the same, though his *Comus*, &c. had been published at least

25 years before the return of Charles II. At the same time, numerous contemptible versifiers on both sides were in possession of great celebrity.

Sometimes fame falls where it is merited, as in Lord Byron's case; but not often. Lord Byron had, perhaps, a greater excess of it than ever happened to a real poet in his life; and it was the more extraordinary, because it was unwilling and extorted fame. Yet I suspect that he was not satisfied with it: perhaps it palled upon him; perhaps it *still increased his appetite by feeding*. When it does not come in full measure, it rather irritates than delights, because it does not fulfil expectations; and perhaps a dull despair is less unsatisfactory, because, if it gives no pleasure, it hardens us into an insensibility to pain. Still I think the high fame which was bestowed on Lord Byron did him good. It softened both his heart and his temper; it made him benevolent, (for, with all his bitter humours, he was unquestionably benevolent), and encouraged his imagination to take more exalted and

generous flights. Milton alone could pine in obscurity and neglect, yet suffer no misanthropy to enter his bosom, and no oppression to chill his imaginative enthusiasm. There is nothing more magnificent than that calm self-confidence which, judging rightly of its own powers and merits, goes calmly on, not only without a cheer, but in defiance of daily impediments and unappeasable opposition. It may be answered, What is to teach conceit its own unworthiness but the consent of public opinion? To this it may be replied, That the knowledge where to persevere in spite of it is the transcendant proof of genius.

If the *vox populi* be the *vox Dei*, then the *vox Dei* is as uncertain as the blowing of the wind, which blows from the north to-day and from the south to-morrow. But perseverance will sometimes master the public mind, for it is as servile as it is capricious, and often only laughs at those who obey it; especially if they do not take to themselves the *appearance* of airs of superiority.

It is fear to go alone that makes any

literary production, which has freshness and energy, so rare. The fields of intellectual observation or fiction are not exhausted, nor ever can be: the more the world advances, the more numerous are the materials and modes of new combination: the public love pictures of light, superficial, familiar manners; but they might be brought to relish much higher subjects, were there passion, energy, strong imagery, powerful sentiment, introduced. Great characters might be contrasted, and something brought forward which should unite spirit and matter in their due proportions. Prose fiction has never yet been what it ought to be, nor taken the range of which it is capable. In almost every thing yet produced, there is a want of *verisimility*, or a want of dignified and important subject. The verisimility is only in common-place characters and familiar manners, and even there it is very imperfect.

But it is the too early desire of fame, the inordinate craving for the world's distinction, which is the bane of high endeavours;

it is the subservience to the world's humours, the pampering its corrupt appetite, the bowing to its mean authority, which makes the intellect abject, and suppresses the fire of genius. It is a mistaken policy into the bargain, for the public,

> " Like women, born to be controul'd,
> Stoop to the forward, and the bold."

Collins burnt all the copies of his inimitable *Odes*, because they would not sell; and *Warton's History of English Poetry*, after forty years, is not yet reprinted; and was long, I believe, a drug in the market. At the same time, *Hayley's Triumphs of Temper* went through several rapid editions.

If the attainment of fame gives little lasting pleasure, the loss of it, after it has been once possessed, causes incessant and incurable regret. The pain of debasement is tenfold greater than the joy of elevation. Even in the new atmosphere to which we are lifted up, as well as in the profundities into which we are cast, we are but subjected to new mortifications. The new temperament renders us more susceptible

of pain; in the old, the quantum is doubled upon us.

Sometimes I think I should prefer the imperturbed insensibility of despondence; for hope is never raised but to be cast down again.

"What call unknown, what charms presume
To break the quiet of the tomb?
Who thus afflicts my troubled sprite,
And drags me from the realms of night?
Long on these mould'ring bones have beat
The winter's snow, the summer's heat,
The drenching dews, and driving rain!
Let me, let me sleep again.
Who is he, with voice unblest,
That calls me from the bed of rest?" *

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* Gray.

LETTER XV.

29th July, 1824.

It is the business of philosophy to imagine nothing, but to found all its inductions on *experience*. Poetry is the reverse of this: it is the province of poetry to go beyond the narrow bounds of experience, and imagine every thing that is grand, beautiful, and tender, within the limits of probability. It is contrary to the essence of strict poetry to describe from experience, and not from invention; though some of the minor traits and colours of poetry may be given to such a description.

This faculty of imagination is decried as empty, because it is supposed to be a shadow, and not a reality. It is not a reality, if the meaning of that word be confined to *matter*; but if whatever exists, if spirit and intellect, can be reality, it *is* a reality. Now a large part of the existence of a human being

consists in thought and sentiment. It is to feed, direct, and exalt that portion of our nature, that poetry ought to bend all its energies and endeavours.

All the delight of our being lies in imagination; the actual gratifications of material experience are always disappointing and dull. But imagination has its limits; its principles, and its regularities, as much as fact: it is as easy to outrage the probabilities of imagination as of material occurrence. Imaginative existences act uniformly on the human intellect, and are not the caprices of individual minds. But, though they act uniformly, they do not act with equal vigour and distinctness on all. It requires the aid of the poet's hand to reach the chords of the heart, to penetrate the ashes that overlay the top of the bosom, and awaken the sleeping fire.

A poet of high perceptions, of high faculties of embodying, and turning into shape and form these visionary existences, and of high susceptibility of strong emotion at the impressions made by them, possesses

a spell equal to the creation of another world a thousand times more splendid and exquisite than what our outward senses can embrace. But this most lofty and most genuine purpose of poetry is seldom much attempted or thought of. Few are adequately endowed with all the necessary faculties to execute it,—and of the greater portion of those who are, fashion and bad taste mislead the energies. It requires a decided and habitual dominion of an exalting intellect, which supports the possessor above the atmosphere of the grovelling pleasures of the world, and the constant temptations of the senses. When once the mind imbodies and imbrutes, the perception becomes too clouded for these evanescent images.

Those whimsical compositions, which are made by the forced and unnatural associations of the stores of the fancy, have nothing in common with these visionary *existences;* they are *not* existences, but artificial attempts to mock them, which have no life or similitude. The genuine visions always exist, though the greater part of

mankind are too dull and sensual always to see them.

The attempt to make the image or thought, which is not poetical in itself, poetical by the dress, is a miserable substitute. It is an artifice which, instead of giving pleasure to sound minds and good judges, disgusts; there is something in it which partakes of deceit,—which covers with flowers that which is insipid and worthless. If the flowers are good, they ought to be reserved for something better, or formed into a wreath which should profess to rest its attraction on its own beauty. The forms and artifices of poetry are in themselves good for nothing; the form of prose is much better, because more simple, where the poetry of the *idea* does not *force* the poetical form. I hate a figurative style to recommend a cold, tame, trite idea; or to convey *facts* which, if they are facts, cannot be poetical.

Lord Byron, in a note to one of his poems, has repelled the charge of plagiarism with some warmth: the charge was unjust; but I

do not think that he has rested his defence on good reasonings; his practice was right, but he did not seem exactly to apprehend the theory of his own practice. The allusion is to the description of a *shipwreck*, which he was accused of versifying with verbal exactness from some printed prose narratives. He answered, that all narrative poems were made up of facts, such as those of Homer, Virgil, &c.; that facts must be taken from history; and that the more exact they were, the better they were. (I write only from memory: if I am wrong, my observations will not apply to Lord Byron, but still they may be worth attention as generally true.) Now all this is surely incorrect. If facts are the basis of the epic poet's matter, all the circumstances, details, and colourings, are, or ought to be, the imagination of the poet; all, except the mere hint, are, as far as the poet is concerned, pure invention; or, if they are not strictly so, the selection and re-combination give them a claim to the merit of a secondary sort of invention. But Lord

Byron ought to have rested his defence of the *shipwreck picture* in *Don Juan* on other grounds. He should have said, that the poem being *comic*, and partly *mock-heroic*, the fidelity of the details was no plagiarism, but an open copy, for the purpose of contrasting with the whim of much of the surrounding extravagant fiction, and for the purpose of surprising by the *naïveté* with which the circumstances so interesting in themselves were versified by the skill and boldness which such an unadorned adoption of prose exhibited, and by an open proof thus given of a confidence of original and inventive powers, of which such adoption of others' words in a particular case, and for a particular purpose, could never diminish the credit. But it is impossible that a position, such as that which I have attributed to Lord Byron, can be supported. If it were, the versification of an historian, as nearly as possible in the words of the original, would make the best epic poem.

What is *imagined* by a profound poet is more true to the spirit of the noblest parts

of our general nature, than the most exact copies of individual examples drawn from life would be. And this sort of imaginative creation is exactly that on which Lord Byron's fame must be built: it is strange, therefore, if I am not mistaken in what I suppose him to have incautiously advanced. No English poets, except Shakspeare and Milton, have *invented*, with such dark and energetic magnificence, and, at the same time, with such a regard to the truth of ideal existences, as Lord Byron. He could not, therefore, gravely think the most exact copy of *facts* to be the best poetry, which is not only not the best, but no poetry at all.

In truth, there is very little strict genuine poetry of the first class to be found any where. It must be all invention; but not an artificial invention: the invention must consist in the *imbodiment* of what is spiritual, not in the creation of a *non-existence*. It must not be the forced junction of discordant parts which do not amalgamate into one whole: it must not be such as the mind cannot believe; such as it knows to be a

wilful and impossible fiction. Even where there is true invention, it may fall short of excellence by being after the model of those parts of nature which are not the most dignified and worthy; or after that of such ideal existences as are not most exalted and admirable. To create after the design of feeble, sickly, unmanly, effeminate originals, shows a subordinate intellect and ignoble heart.

But the number of artificial tastes which is to be found among the mass of readers, is much greater than is suspected. Quick intellectual apprehension is far more common among those who mix much in society than quick feeling; *esprit* prevails more than sensibility; these readers are, therefore, easier taught to appreciate technical skill than native force or pathos. The rules of art can be learned; nature only can confer the seeds of sympathy with what derives its strength from natural emotion. Collision with the world polishes away feeling where it existed, and substitutes for it a superficial and ceremonial semblance which has a fel-

low-feeling for whatever is affected, and brought by study and toil to the sort of excellence it has acquired. We therefore could name poets of very extensive popularity, whose whole attraction lies in this sort of perfection, gained by

> ——— "Outwatching the bear,
> "By the lamp, at midnight hour!"

Such poets are the delight of the *dandies* and the *belles*, who talk by rote, and affect only such pleasures as are fashionable; who would not have their features discomposed by the vulgarity of violent emotions; and who think a simper, a sigh, and a tear, all that is to be conceded from the dominion of self-possession and apathy.

But the emotions of the grand passions, the gloom of a magnificent imagination darkened, but rendered more vigorous, rather than enfeebled, by the wrongs of life; the splendours of genius which throw a blaze on the tumults raging in the innermost recesses of a bosom subjected to the dominion of high intellect and lofty desires;

the representation of these is what arrests the curiosity of native energies, and which gives an impulse among the more operative spirits of society calculated to establish the empire of mind. The petty genius that is wasted to gild the wings, and cover with patches of gold-leaf the frivolous vices, of the tribes

> ——— "Of busy and of gay,
> Who flutter through life's little day,
> Their painted plumage to display,"

is mischievous as well as fatiguing, by seeming to give the plausibility of poetical charm to what is only a fit subject for scorn.

I suspect, that the character and degree of the poetical faculty are a good deal influenced and directed by the impulse of the moral sensibility, on which, in return, the imagination equally re-acts. The mere intellectual power is insufficient to give the inventive faculty a right course and operation of adequate interest. It does not teach properly from what chords the most

music can be drawn, and which the winds of heaven will bear widest and strongest through the channels of the human heart. But not unfrequently there is feeling without imagination, and then its operations are limited, and end without going beyond the subjects of actual experience: often there is imagination without feeling, and then it is apt to become whimsical and extravagant. A constant liability and experience of strong emotion, which is, at the same time, natural and worthily excited, leaves no leisure for what is fantastic. They who are at sufficient ease to nurse factitious emotion are not under the prevalent dominion of any decided passions, impressions, or thoughts. This is equally true of a laboured and artificial style, on which the warmth of inspiration will not permit a genuine poet to dwell.

It may be said, that if these deep moral feelings exist, it is sufficient; the poet cannot make them greater; and if they do not exist, then the praise claimed for this sort of composition is not merited. But the poet *can* make them greater: his power of selec-

tion, his discrimination of circumstances, the sentiments and reflections he associates with his imagery, the warmth of his language, the shape and form which he gives to that of which the spirituality eludes the palpable perception of common eyes, add infinite force to these feelings, which in less gifted minds are, without such assistance, imperfect and fleeting. An invisible world is thus unveiled, and rendered clear and permanent.

LETTER XVI.

30th July, 1824.

I HAVE neither taste nor mercy for the freaks of an idle and careless imagination. All poetical invention should be exercised in imagery such as would operate importantly in real life, and in the sentiments and passions which imagery of this sort is calculated to awaken in our general nature. There should be a gravity and sincerity in the fiction, such as makes the impression of it "homefelt," and gives it "a sober certainty:" though the tale or image be *feigned*, it should represent *truth*, and deeply affecting truth. They whose inventions play upon the surface of life, or are directed to amuse by those substitutes for the *verisimility* of fiction, which deal in factitious combinations, and raise a momentary interest by the false stimulus of surprise, are poetasters, not poets. Let

us suppose a painter, thrown by chance, an eye-witness of some grand battle. What should we say, if, instead of endeavouring to transmit to his canvass the representation of its grand images and terrible conflicts, he should shrink from his subject, and prefer the delineation of some grotesque figures playing unconsciously in the skirts of the camp; and by way of supplying a factitious interest, invent some extravagant figure or group of figures, which every sound judgment must know could never have existed, at least in that situation? Should we not despise, and be disgusted with, the littleness of such a mind? But is not that affecter of poetry at least as culpable, who deserts his function, and withdraws the powers of his mind from the display of those grand conflicts which are in perpetual activity in the bosoms of highly endowed human beings, and offers, instead of the impressive and instructive pictures on which he ought thus to have employed himself, the petty whims of his own perverse ingenuity? We cannot mistake the

measure which he thus exhibits of his own genius. It is easy to invent, where there is no regard to probability, where there is no necessity of grandeur or pathos, and where the sole effects sought are novelty and wonder. These inventions sit light upon the author who produces them; there is no *wear and tear* of passions; they are totally artificial, not intrinsic; and he can put them on and off like his clothes: he lives as others live; he goes into the world, and mixes on equal terms with other men; the fit lasts only while he is at his work; it requires no precedent awakening into a temperament of inspiration; and it leaves none of the effects of inspiration, in languor, exhaustion, and ill humour with the world. It affects him no more than the old-fashioned fine gentleman was affected by the ceremonial of enquiries and compliments which he lavished in such abundance in every company into which he was thrown. It is quite as heartless, and scarcely more entertaining.

A grand and genuine poetical genius,—he whose imagination is filled with all the higher interests of humanity, intellectual, moral, and material, — is quite an opposite sort of being: he is one who lives under the dominion of mighty energies; over whom his involuntary impressions reign with a kind of despotism; who is not a master of the circumstances in which he may be placed; and who seeing what others do not see, appears to others to be agitated without reason; melancholy where he ought to be gay, and angry where there seems no cause for any other feeling than complacence. He scarce ever does become a man of the world: but if he does, his genius evaporates, his energies are chilled, and he experiences no longer any fires, but those of vulgar excitement.

It will, perhaps, be asked, "What means "this contradictoriness of theory, which "places all the merit of high genius in its "intimate connection with the grand in-"terests of human life, and yet insists on "its incompatibility to mingle cordially

" with life itself?" I answer, that what is designed for the use of society need not therefore be *created* amid the heat and bustle of society. The productions which have most served mankind have been bred and nursed in solitude: in the depths of the forest has been fostered to its greatest size and strength the majestic oak, that afterwards forms the pillars and vaulted canopies of mighty palaces, in which " thronged " cities" and the splendour of society most display themselves.

I think it is *Thomson*, who speaks of that meditative turn,

" Which shuns by fits, yet loves mankind."

The external materials of thought are quickly collected; and we may observe, in one half hour, that which will afford food for reflection which may employ us for days. All the best part of our existence lies in that which passes within us; it is the internal, not external, presence of images, with the consequent movements which they awaken. But a great genius must keep his

attention steady to these; he must still adhere to general nature, though it be intellectual rather than material nature; he must not shut himself up to imagine things which outrage the principles of nature, or which occupy themselves only with its trifles or its absurdities.

It will be said, that no one can *imagine* with more fidelity than he can *observe*. This assumes that the regard is limited to external and material objects. But even thus the position is not correct; it may be true of an individual object; it is not true of the general character of a class of objects. If regard be extended to that which passes internally in the minds of others, then unquestionably imagination is more calculated to pierce the veil and acquire a correct likeness than observation. The outward marks of inward movements are fallacious: it is imagination which holds the lamp, that cannot be eluded. The scattered rays are collected in the calmness of solitude, and brought to throw a body of light, by which all is developed in its lines,

shapes, and forms, as a new country in a map, or clear landscape.

When a poetaster retires to embody the spiritual stores, which, under whatever circumstances, his mind has treasured up, he either selects those which are most prominent and give him most pleasure, or those which he deems most likely to please the public. The character of his matter must, therefore, be taken to be the measure either of his ability and taste, or of his judgment. If he deals in what is stale, trite, and insipid, he wants the faculties both of discernment and of feeling; if he deals in what is extravagant and improbable, his discernment and feeling are so coarse, as only to be awakened by false stimulants: if he be more subtle than vigorous, more minutely laboured and polished, than natural, simple, and manly; more delicately and effeminately sentimental, than energetically passionate, and more ingeniously refined in the expression, than in the spirit of love; then he is a stranger to all the nobler movements of our nature, and in-

sensible of the grand conceptions, by which certain gifted beings become objects of just admiration to the world. If he should wander away from the real characters of mankind, and the real course of human action, into pictures of feigned manners and ideal morals, which he deems more interesting, as well as more simple, but which more sober judgments consider to be as deficient in attraction as they are improbable, then he is one who is too much lost in his own conceits to have any lively sympathy with the real joys and afflictions of human life. If he draws nothing but the frightful likeness of the miseries of humble life, then it is clear that his eye is only quick to discern deformity, and acute in poring upon squalidness; and that he is so intent to aggravate the repulsive bitternesses of life, as to join so intimacy with scenes, to which, however painful, habit may reconcile us, a sense of suffering which belongs only to those to whom they are strange. If he be one who is occupied in reaching splendour of style, and applying

industry to give the brilliance of a high polish to his expressions, and the charm of smoothness and harmony to his versification, then he cannot be one who feels an intense interest in his subject; for that would absorb him from all minute labours, and utterly withdraw his attention from the study of technical beauties. He must be of a chill temperament, not alive to what forms the stamina, the soul, spirit, substance, and being of poetry, and only alive to its dress, and to such interest as art can give to it.

He who is born with the faculties which alone can make a true and great poet has no choice as to any other *materials* or subjects of invention than those which are fit for poetry, or of any other *sort* of invention than that which poetry admits.

LETTER XVII.

31st July, 1824.

IMAGINATION, without a knowledge of truth, may invent, but not invent poetically:—a knowledge of truth, without imagination, cannot furnish poetry, because there will be no invention. Invention will take the course with which it is most conversant, and where its interest or feeling is most excited; that is, it will embody and illustrate the abstract and general truths which most press upon it. It is, therefore, quite impossible, that he, whose mind is filled with those deep sentiments and reflections for which this mingled life gives occasion to every one, should be free to let his invention deal in extravagances or trifles, which have no similitude to life, or no sympathy with its important concerns. He who thus occupies himself, is insensible, or

not duly sensible, to what constitutes the joint glory and pain of our existence. It is our mortal destiny to be exposed to inexplicable sorrows; to incur disappointments; to have blessings torn from us, and injuries and misfortunes inflicted on us, of which we cannot see the cause. These griefs affect us differently according to our susceptibilities, our force of intellect, and the discipline of our faculties: but it is the manner in which the emotions resulting from these causes associate themselves with the external and material objects with which we are conversant, that gives the colouring and main strength of impression to those objects. And these are precisely what it is among the chief purposes of poetry to embody: it is to make what has passed invisibly equally palpable in one picture with the visible: it is in this that the province of the poet so far exceeds that of the painter: this is the distinction, and here is the vast superiority.

What is merely visible to the eye can never give equal delight in the description

of the most brilliant poet as in the prospect of nature itself. But the great and genuine poet presents much more than is visible to the eye; he embodies what is spiritual, and adds it to the view; he presents a double creation, and is himself the creator of the richest part. He who creates a landscape richer than nature, by merely selecting and re-combining the material composites of nature, is a poet; but how far inferior to this *positive* creation, which goes so immeasurably beyond mere *novelty* of combination!

By some common but inscrutable law of our being each passion gives its own aspect to material objects, of which the similarity is generally acknowledged through the multiplied varieties of the human bosom. But that aspect is in many too faint or too confused to be developed; it wants the poet's hand to turn it into distinct shape, and clear colours.

All attempts at any other test of poetry will fail; all that seeks novelty of creation by departing from nature is an effort to awaken interest, and claim the praise of

genius, by false means. To comprehend the intellectual as well as the corporeal properties of our being, is not to depart from nature, but to take within its scope that, without which the most essential part of it would be omitted; and here lies the proper field on which the imaginative faculty is to operate,—not in illegitimate combinations of matter, where non-existences and impossibilities are called *creation.*

The nearer we come to nature, the more perfect is the poetry; but then it must be high, dignified, and beautiful nature; it must be spiritual blended with material nature, and both put by the powers of imagination into palpable form. I have learned that Lord Byron said, that he could do nothing which had not some foundation in reality. I suppose he meant some feeling actually experienced, or some observation actually made, which set his imagination to work in earnest. This is exactly what I had supposed, and exactly accordant to my theory. It is animation, life, nature, and intense sensibility, which gives the over-

whelming magic to this most genuine poet. He never deals in trifles, and never is studied or far-sought,—because he is under the dominion of involuntary emotion.

It is not necessary to go far for subjects of poetry, to turn into by-paths, or to seek them in unvisited or unknown regions, which if described with fidelity, will shock by their barbarisms; and if described falsely, will revolt every sound judgment by improbabilities and impossibilities. Scarce a day passes in any one's life which does not offer due topics of poetry. All mortals experience joy and sorrow; and joy and sorrow see the dawn of morning, and the fading of sunset, with different eyes. This gives a perpetual variety to the scenery of nature when associated to human feelings. The tints are as changeable and numerous as those of the rainbow, and as difficult to be caught and fixed. Tens of thousands are susceptible of the strongest and most beautiful impressions, for one who is able to give them a substantial existence by means of language. Our material nature,

when taken by itself, seems capable only of most gross and most imperfect enjoyments, yet subjected to innumerable and most intense sufferings. Intellect and imagination only can confer deep and satisfactory pleasure on the circumstances in which we are placed, and mitigate the pains and diseases to which our bodies are liable. All the modes by which these evanescent parts of our being can be brought out, rendered durable, and made more perceptible by the duller senses of the great mass of mankind, are among the nobler occupations of the most useful faculties of genius.

It may be asked, why, if this be the proper field of poetry, obvious as in that case it must be, it is not more cultivated? The answer is, that it demands higher powers than common poets possess. It requires an extraordinary force combined with an extraordinary rectitude of feeling; it requires not merely a clear fancy, but an active, vivid, and just imagination; a sagacious observation, never asleep when

the occasion offers; a command of adequate language, which alone is rarely possessed, and rendered available by practice; and, lastly, an undamped industry which puts these powers and acquirements into substantial and communicable form.

That poetry which is the mere poetry of style, which pays little attention to the value of the ore, and rests its merit on the skill of the workmanship, is produced with much greater facility, and by means of much more ordinary gifts. Almost all artificial excellence is attainable by mere labour, care, and instruction. And it is that which critics, who are commonly *technical* creatures, can best appreciate. From the novelty also produced by the forced and far-sought fictions of art, there often results a deception which mistakes the violent excitement of surprise for the liveliness of natural sympathy.

False criticism, the assumption of false principles perpetually inculcated, the vicious or ignorant judgments of those who give a tone to the public voice, the un-

taught rage of corrupt, silly, or absurd fashion, often mislead authors, and sometimes turn the genius, which wants self-confidence and firmness, into wrong channels. But I can scarcely suppose that it would be possible so to turn *primary* genius.

Notwithstanding the great influence which the above causes must have in propagating bad taste, I yet must confess that they do not seem to me entirely adequate to the effect. I am unable to satisfy myself by what means *bad* poetry does (as it so often in fact does) make its way over the head of *good* poetry. I can conceive how it may make its way, when it has not to *contend* with good;—and I admit that this is the common case: for *good* very rarely appears upon the stage. But when *good* does appear, it might be thought that it would be acknowledged by the universal heart of man with one acclamation. From that moment all the tricks by which technical poetry strikes are blown into air; as if, after a fine-dressed beauty, made up in the

pink of the fashion, should have attracted *every* eye of an assembly by the elegance of her person and appearance, the *Venus de Medicis* endowed with life should rise up in the middle of the circle! Would *one* eye still be found to admire the goddess of *millinery* charms?

But I must own that the *millinery* of poetry would still retain its admirers; and this, notwithstanding the inferiority, is not less decided. To *me*, this artificial poetry is of all reading the most repulsive, and the most full of fatigue. I cannot bear any reading intended for amusement, and much less for high delight, which does not hurry me on; which does not bear me forward by the force and heat of its own movement. All which delays the reader to find a recondite meaning, or to admire a simile, a metaphor, or a prettily-turned period, is a fault, — not a merit. For this reason, no one who is not minutely familiar with that part of English history to which *Gray's Bard* alludes can read that splendid ode with the appropriate pleasure

which it is the business of true poetry to awaken; and as to *The Progress of Poesy*, its obscurity and recondite allusions form an unpardonable defect in it *as a whole*, though detached parts are exquisite.

There are those who, assuming that poetry ought to be something more beautiful than reality, think that such beauty may be formed by representing things in a character of sickly softness and feebleness, as if there was tenderness in tenuity, and elegance in triteness. But there can be no tenderness in what is weak, nor elegance in what is common. It is a fault to vary from nature in its nobler instances of united mind and body; but to *weaken* and *impoverish* nature, in the attempt to improve it, is worse still.

What is there of magnificent, or beautiful, or tender, or intensely passionate, which is not to be found in nature itself? Which of these was not unveiled to the eyes of Lord Byron? Why is not life, with all its evils, better and more poetical than any but the very noblest poets make it? All the

grandest and most poetical passages of Shakspeare derive one of their prime charms from their extreme *verisimility*. — This seems to me also to be the case with all the most powerful parts of Lord Byron's poetry. Great as the clamours against him have been, he has done it even with sacred subjects: the manner in which he has managed the intensity of human interests in his *Heaven and Earth* is ineffably surprising.

They, who deem embellishments necessary, either never could have moved in the sphere where the dignity or grace of nature's forms is displayed, or must have had a sight too dim and clouded to discern them. Nature does not want the embellishments of man's petty wit; and least of all, does it want the tissue of finical language and effeminate tawdry ornament: plainness is the proof of strength, and even the rudest language cannot destroy the charm of a noble imagination; not that rude language does often, in fact, clothe a noble imagination; because a splendid

imagination commonly imparts its force and brilliance to the diction, even where the ordinary and necessary labour of art is wanting.

The rules of art have generally the effect of discouraging genius by the trammels they propose, while they urge forward mediocrity by the confidence in the assistance they will lend. They breed the same satiating round of endless repetitions, still mimicking and echoing each other on beaten ground, while they deter genius from venturing upon unexplored regions and pouring forth those ebullitions which, as they are unsought, have the best chance of freshness, vigour, and truth.

It too frequently happens, that genius is not brought to know its own powers, except by a long and gradual concurrence of circumstances. All the parade about art, and all the distinction conferred upon it, tend to overshadow genius in the outset; it hears qualities praised, which it knows that it does not itself possess; and it sees attention directed to subjects with which it feels no

sympathy; it shrinks, therefore, from exerting itself in its own natural course, and does not venture to deal with topics in which others seem to have very little interest. At length, perhaps, in carelessness or despair, it sports with some of these slighted things, and draws music from them which surprises others as well as itself; — success begets confidence; and at last it finds that the very taste which was considered the mark of its imbecility is the proof of its strength.

If this could often happen, the empire of genuine poetry over false would be by degrees established, but it shines forth only once in an age, or in two or three ages; and in the interval, corrupt taste gains strength by habit, and is so much encouraged by the numerous classes of mechanical critics and mechanical readers, that it cannot be much shaken, or allow the genuine more than temporary and divided empire. When the true light is withdrawn, the age soon relapses into darkness, and the vulgar models are replaced in full dominion.

The wonder is, that what seems easiest is not most practised; that which has an interest in all our bosoms;

> " That which before us lies in daily life,
> *As* the prime wisdom;"

that which comes unsought.

LETTER XVIII.

1st August, 1824.

NOVELTY is, unfortunately, too generally sought at the expence of better sources of interest. Common minds look for excitement beyond what is natural. That sober and unexaggerated surprise which is raised by what is at once *new* and *just*, does not satisfy them. It would be both trite and tedious to pursue this subject through all the forms it takes. It changes its fashion at short intervals, and draws in its train not only all versifiers of subordinate genius, but sometimes great genius in its first attempts, before it sufficiently feels its own strength. Lord Byron is a striking example of this. Pre-eminently original as his powers were latterly proved to have been, the poems of his first fame are, in the main, the reverse of original. The *first two* cantos of *Childe Harold*, *Parisina*, the *Siege of Corinth*, the

Bride of Abydos, in almost every page, remind us of the jumbled particularities of imagery, sentiment, and expression, of those who immediately preceded him, and were in vogue. That extraordinary brilliance and force peculiar to himself, does, indeed, now and then show a dawn of its future emergence, but very sparingly. Yet this is not the only singularity: these great defects were utterly dismissed in the *Corsair* and *Lara*, apparently composed, or at least published, at the same period.

I call them *great defects*, because a patchwork style is highly revolting; and how much more objectionable, when what is thus borrowed, is in itself faulty. The larger proportion of these disjointed and ill-applied ornaments are vicious singularities, uncouth mimickries of what was obsolete, and which, when they had lost the novelty of their first revival, had lost all their little claim to notice. How the mind of Lord Byron, always so rich in pure unsophisticated strength, could be so far caught by this trifling sort of mechanism as to degrade

himself even by imitating it, exceeds my power to apologize or account for. Such substitutes for legitimate attraction are the artifices of weakness, even in him who *first* adopts them.

These faults are more especially apparent in the style than in the matter. No style can be good which has any thing of affectation in it; and, above all, *borrowed* affectation. It is an open admission, that the matter has not enough of intrinsic worth to support itself; like a woman claiming the praise of beauty, who never uses paint while she has a natural bloom. Artifice, when it is skilful, and in as good a taste as artifice can be, soon wearies; but it is, too often, intrinsically and radically tasteless, and even absurd. Yet the taste and ambition of many authors, who deem themselves poets, and whom the world calls poets, never rise above artifice; they have not within them a fountain fed by the original water of Helicon. Their little stream, which they would have mistaken for *Heliconian*, is but a distillation made up of rose-water and

other costly perfumes at the chemist's shop.

The strength and essential charm of poetry does not lie in these far-sought materials; it lies in the daily emotions of our intellectual nature; in those impressions, sentiments, and reflections, which constitute our happiness or our misery; to what comes too deeply home to our bosoms to depend on petty ornament or painfully laboured expression for its interest; to what is too much in earnest to be *finical*, and too grand to be distracted by petty lures for admiration.

To live in this busy, agitated, and rich-featured, deep-coloured world, with a mind so weak, that, while it is seeking for subjects to display its ingenuity, its attention can only fix on toys or extravagances, is as frivolous as one who, crossing the *Alps* or the *Apennines*, with the beech-covered summits bending beneath the roaring blasts that sweep over them from the Mediterranean to the Adriatic, should be insensible to the majestic views and movements around

him, while all his eyes and curiosity were awake to the accidental rencontre of the figure of some travelling *dandy* or *belle* drest in the unfamiliar costume of Florence, Rome, or Naples.

A moral, highly sensitive mind, has no room or leisure for what is mere idle amusement, or a subject of petty curiosity. Its thoughts and its feelings are too intensely occupied with the energies and the sorrows of our human existence. It is idle to go far for novelty, which is intrinsically either insipid, inaccurate, perhaps entirely mistaken, displeasing, or immoral, while every day affords us at home subjects which unite novelty with profound interest and truth. I confess that my deliberate judgment includes, in this stigma, the introduction (with scarcely an exception) of Oriental tales into the poetry of England or the northern nations. I do not object to the delineation of the passions, which are common to our nature in all countries, but I object to all the minutiæ of mere local manners; to all mere national phraseology; to all incidents of

which the interest depends solely on particular habits and customs; to all enormities which are virtues in a particular country, in opposition to the common sense of mankind. To this censure I consider the greater part of Lord Byron's poems on eastern stories amenable. If Lord Byron could not overcome these objections, who can? In addition to his extraordinary genius, he had spent much time in the East, at that period of life when impressions are strongest; had mingled with the people, and knew their manners practically. Still there is a great appearance of exaggeration and false fiction about these poems. But if fidelity has been preserved, yet the imagery, sentiments, and incidents, fall short, in general, of raising a strong, pure, and just interest. Lord Byron has shown, in his latter poems, above all, perhaps, except Shakspeare or Dante, with what intense power he could seize on the most affecting features of the most pathetic images, and impart the impression to his readers; but, unless in two passages, he has not done so in the eastern

tales, which I have condemned; he has passed very lamely and superficially over events on which all the glow of his muse might have been thrown, like a weak winter ray of the sun, which cannot penetrate or warm the object on which it falls, but slides off, and leaves no trace of its glance. I am not, however, positive that this fault is to be attributed to the subject; perhaps these poems were written much earlier than they were published, and Lord Byron had not yet attained his vigour. *Parisina*, which is not an eastern tale, is still more remarkable for this defect.

This very striking inequality in such a genius ought to make critics a little more cautious, candid, and forbearing, in the condemnation of young authors. Where the seeds of genius are profusely bestowed, it often happens that great toil, culture, and long practice, are necessary to bring them into mature fruit. Lord Byron commenced with using the words of others, as a schoolboy makes Latin verses by supplies of phraseology and hemisticks from the *Gra-*

dus ad Parnassum; but he gradually rejected all this borrowed garb; and in the *best* of his *latter* poems formed a style both more peculiarly his own, and more pure, and manly, and excellent, than that of any other modern poet; a style which cannot be imitated or parodied, because its excellence lies in its *propriety*, which is never richer than the occasion requires, but always rises with it.

The habit of using the language of others, when once contracted, is very rarely abandoned or overcome. It cannot be acquired without a strong memory, and he who has a memory to supply the ready-formed expressions of others, is tempted to forego the toil of finding words of his own. The words of others officiously obtrude themselves against the writer's will; and, even in the effort to reject them, he is apt to fall into constraint and affectation. Perhaps, however, a deep mind, like a deep soil on which light seeds have been scattered by strange hands, will, when it begins to heave with the birth of its own native produce,

throw off the extraneous covering of its surface.

It has been supposed, that a want of due feeling for the graver concerns of life, a want of regard for the objects within our cognisance proportioned to their importance, arises from a defective understanding; but hearts of strong and just sensibility are often to be found where the understanding is weak, and hearts which are hard, or which occupy their feelings with what is trifling, or what is unworthy, where the intellect is ingenious, and even where it is powerful.

Yet just and strong feeling will not constitute genius without intellect, any more than intellect without feeling. As little can these united produce good poetry without the aid of clear and bright imagination. But strong understanding or good sense has been thought the least necessary of the ingredients; yet, without it, I do not believe that any sound poetical composition has ever yet been achieved.

Truth and wisdom are as much the proper end of poetry as they are of prose. One

differs from the other in the means, not in the end; the province of one is to instruct by the imagination, of the other, by the reason; one is to delight while it instructs, —the other may be content with instruction only. But what shall we say of that which affects to be poetry, yet conveys no truth or wisdom, exerts no imagination, and gives no delight? It is difficult to separate truth and wisdom, yet the knowledge of truth, taken in a narrow sense, may not always be the knowledge of wisdom. Imagination may be so exerted as to convey truth, yet not give delight, or to give delight, yet not convey wisdom; because it may convey a limited and partial, though captivating truth.

Imagination heightens; — it may justly heighten what encourages our virtuous passions; but it ought not to heighten those images by which our vicious passions are inflamed. Without verisimility there will be no sympathy; but as the sympathy raised may be mischievous, the poetry may be good when the morality is bad. This has

been the charge against the poetry of Lord Byron; it has been much exaggerated, but it is sometimes true.

If the moral sense so predominated over mankind that evil could never be beautiful, then no immoral poetry could ever be beautiful, however splendid; but human nature is too imperfect for this; and delusive beauty is permitted to hold a strong enchantment over those who have not purified their minds by sound culture and strenuous exertion.

As to those who would be wicked, but know not how; whose desire is great, but who have not the talent and genius to be so effectually; who have not the spell to create what enmarvels and enchains the reader's faculty; are they less immoral because they have the will to be wicked, without the ability?

Images of deformity cannot make poetry, however moral they may be: images of beauty will make poetry, however immoral they may be. But nothing can be beautiful

that is unnatural; yet much that is natural may be deformed.

The sin of forty-nine fiftieths of all poetry is *affectation*,—a distrust of the force of nature, or an inability to reach it. I think it is principally the latter. Contrivance, pretence, and disguise, always accompany weakness; gilding and varnish are applied to cover bad materials. Where strength and beauty are at command, the taste is seldom so corrupt as to prefer to it what is tawdry and hollow. Bad pictures may be admired by those who are strangers to good ones; but put a set of fine pictures beside them, and few, except the very rude and boorish, will not be surprised at their former admiration.

In this age, which has boasted its escape from the shackles of rule, and the cold restraints of artificial models, there has been introduced a greater quantity of affected phraseology, affected imagery, affected sentiments, and affected incidents and characters, than in all the precedent body of English poetry from *Chaucer* to *Cowper*.

Another excess of the present poetry is its unlimited love of the *mysterious*. Mysteries, occasionally and sparingly introduced, may afford opportunity for the display of fine poetry; for the indefinite is a source of the sublime. But when it is unceasingly resorted to it becomes childish, and loses all its effect. It is generally ascribed to the fashion of admiring German poetry; a country, of which it is better fitted to the manners.

LETTER XIX.

2d August, 1824.

I HAVE often repeated, that true poetry consists of *several* essentials, of which the deficiency of any *one* takes away its title to genuineness. But it has been the misfortune of the present age to seize upon some one and carry it to excess, while all the rest have been neglected. *Invention* has been the grand cry of the day; mere invention, in its largest sense, totally unqualified by any of those requisites without which it cannot be properly poetical. To give it the character of the most positive invention, its professors have prided themselves on paying no regard to *verisimility*. This is unspeakably foolish. It requires very little ingenuity, because it is only to bring together, by a forced junction, discordant things. Novelty alone is not merit, which lies in a *just* novelty. The former age did not ex-

hibit in its poets so much energy, or so much abundance of one or two particular qualities; but it was more sober, and exhibited a competent union of *all* the essentials: it did not show the transcendant genius which entitled its authors to the first class; but it showed what entitled them to a seat in the temple, though below the highest rank.

Nothing can be *learned* from what is extravagant; nor will it give any *pleasure* when the novelty ceases. Man is endowed with a restless curiosity after truth, and a continued love of it when it is possessed. We dwell upon it; we return to it; we find increased charms in it, in proportion as it becomes familiar to us. I have never met with a poem of any deep and lasting interest which does not satisfy the understanding, as well as fill the imagination. Imagination is but the mode offered and adopted to enlighten the understanding; and this is the mode which it is the province of poetry to put into execution. Now what can be taught by extravagance but

error? and the understanding can never be satisfied by error.

Imagination never ends in itself; it leaves something behind or beyond it, of good or of ill; and if that ill gives pain instead of pleasure, it is not poetical imagination. When imagination, vigorous and splendid in itself, and enriched and controuled by all the qualities requisite to poetry, puts itself into action, and produces its illuminations to the world, it is a little surprising that all inferior and imperfect lights should not be totally eclipsed. It must be accounted for by the degradation of intellect and of heart produced by the grovelling pursuits of the world. We know that there are those who prefer the light of lamps and chandeliers in a closed room to the rays of the sun or the moon in the open sky; and the gilded upholstery of a drawing-room to the most smiling and radiant landscapes under the canopy of heaven. It is so with bad poetry, when, in vulgar apprehension, it rivals good. But still these illegitimate poets have no profound and enduring hold of the public

mind; there is a sort of awe and worship which the multitude pay to truth, directness, and force of power, in spite of themselves.

It is a common opinion, that to obtain great splendour, or great pathos, the poet must outrage truth. Nothing can be more false. Truth, embodied by a magnificent imagination, is as much more brilliant and impressive than the creations of a whimsical, factitious, and extravagant invention, as it is more faithful. The passions, the afflictions, the occasional incidents and catastrophes of real life, are a thousand times more striking than sickly fiction can contrive.

A poet lives in an excited and tempestuous temperament; but if the excitement is only of his own artificial nursing, it can last no longer than while he is at work; it is not caused by the scenery and events of actual life; it is not intrinsic and inseparable from his nature; he leaves it on his table when he quits his closet of study; and with common society he is as common as any one else.

But the true poet, whose excitement flows from the actual existences involuntarily operative on his being, has not this double character, of which he can exchange one for the other at his will; unsought susceptibility is his nature; he is not the master of himself; his feelings rule him; he is eccentric, moody, intractable, unsocial, irascible, indignant, and scornful. He sees farther than others; he penetrates deeper; he is more used to contemplate what is noble and refined; and he is struck with causes of anger or disgust where no one else can discern them. Envy and jealousy watch and exaggerate these particularities, and endeavour to depress, by obloquy, those whom they cannot rival. But how is the good to be separated from the evil? How are we to have all the poet's sincere glow of sentiment and force of sensibility, yet take from him the susceptible temperament whence they spring? An uneasy temper is sometimes the result of bodily morbidness; but often of excessive mental quickness of perception, which exertion

cannot overcome, and which ease of station, luxury, and indolence, cannot allay. The coarseness of more vulgar faculties and habits, the obliquities of human desires, intentions, and conduct, disgust, and irritate, and embitter. Then it is that the heart seeks a vent, and genius soothes itself by drawing pictures of its own sufferings. In those lifted by birth into distinction, it would want an impulse sufficiently strong to carry it through the labour by which the mechanism of expression and writing are attained, if it were not extremely vivid and violent.

Nothing is more improbable, than that all the concurring faculties and circumstances which co-operated to give to Lord Byron's poetry all its extraordinary force should be assembled again. First, his intrinsic endowments were such, both in degree and in number, as literature has scarcely ever shown in combination. Secondly, the adventitious incidents were scarcely less particular. His birth, history, adventures, and course of life, were all most

singular; and of a singularity which had a great effect upon the expansion of his genius. He has touched, therefore, on topics, and communicated imagery and feelings in his poetry, which had never hitherto been brought forward, and which no one is ever likely to be fitted to touch with originality again. Nor are these characteristic parts of his writings less intrinsically interesting than they are peculiar and exclusive. They strike home to the deepest and most important sympathies of the human bosom; and are, above all others, remarkable for their sincerity and unfactitious fervour. We therefore learn in them some of the diversities of the human mind in their noblest forms, and displaying themselves in careers and under impressions as rare as they are affecting. When we merely learn the wilful eccentricities of a mind seeking distinction by singularity, and not impelled by nature, we only learn what has neither use nor curiosity. We want to know the splendid peculiarities which Providence sometimes imposes on man; not what he

chooses to make himself by his own vain caprice.

An artificial character is one in whom no faith is to be put; we know how to deal with him who shows his anger or his affection; the knowledge we gain from him is certain, and we are not misled by forming our opinions on doubtful, or disguised, or false facts. He who accustoms himself to disregard the matter so long as he can give it a plausible dress carries it into all his conduct, and only concerns himself to tell that which shall have the most agreeable shape.

I cannot bear *fiction* in the vulgar sense; it is this misapplication of the word to poetry which brings on it all the odium with which fools load it. "What," they cry, "is poetry but fiction? and who can esteem a pack of lies?" There is no mercy for folly which thus puts on the garb of arrogance and conceit. Genuine poetry is not merely truth, but the very highest order of truth; that which requires the soundest knowledge and strongest reason, as well as the most creative and most radiant imagina-

tion. It rejects improbabilities with as much care as the coldest and sternest philosopher; and, by its legitimate rules, no more permits what is contrary to the principles of the human heart and human intellect than a book of natural history records what does not exist in the material world. What is invented after a fabulous model, or, at least, after a model which is not admitted by human belief, is an invention which trifles with the understandings of readers, and is only fit to be addressed to triflers.

LETTER XX.

3d August, 1824.

I CANNOT admit those imperfect acts of imagination to be invention which do not form one web, but are made by joinings: much less those which are made of patches affixed to a consistence already formed. Yet such joinings are the utmost which vulgar invention reaches; there is no amalgamation, no unity. As to didactic poetry, it makes no pretence to invention, and therefore is not required to form a web; all it attempts is, to embroider flowers on the plain surface of abstract principles.

There are many who will blame the nicety of these distinctions, which tends to exclude from the title of poetry so many ingenious compositions, that may yet give rational and refined pleasure. But the use of clear principles, and sound, regular, intelligible standards of judgment, is paramount

to such an objection. Nothing is more desirable than to rescue the decisions to be pronounced on the merits of poetry from the caprice of mere wilful opinion or unenlightened taste. When the definition of poetry is so laid down as to command all rational assent, and the parts are so analysed as to be clearly distinguished, the application of the rules becomes so easy and unequivocal as to leave no opening for doubt. And how great is the advantage of this! What is more painful and irritating than confusion and doubt?

To hear the variety of opinions every where advanced on the comparative poetical merits of different authors is always highly provoking, and it is always very mischievous to the cause of true genius, and the future production of the best poetry. Individuals must necessarily differ in taste, as they differ in capacity and feeling; but then let the gradation of these tastes be settled; do not permit each person to put that class of poetry which he likes the highest, because it is his own; nor him who

prefers the produce of *observation* to that of *imagination;* or that which is *familiar* to that which is *sublime;* or that which is *extravagant* to that which is *sober* and *probable;* to contend that it is mere matter of opinion, which each may indulge as he will, *which* is *best*

It is not matter of opinion; it is matter of principle, founded not merely on authority and the uniform and concurrent sanction of ages, but on clear incontrovertible reason. *Poetry* must, *ex vi termini,* be *invention;* and it is invention *qualified* by several *essential requisites,* if we regard either the practice of those who have from the earliest times enjoyed the greatest fame for this faculty, or the *end* which both reason and authority prove that it has in view, that is, to *instruct* by impressing and *delighting the imagination* of the reader or hearer.

I am aware that loose and secondary critics leave out the limit imposed by the word *instruct,* and assert *delight* to be sufficient without any qualification. If it be so, then, perhaps, *verisimility* is not an essen-

tial; but though the *probable* has been sometimes disregarded by temporary fashion, in its rage for novelty, the disregard has always, without a single exception, sunk the author after the novelty has ceased. The imagination itself is never long pleased with what is strange and improbable; it *retains* no impressions in which the heart does not assist, and the heart is never touched by improbabilities. There is implanted in the heart a sort of consciousness of truth, as if it never made its responses to what it believed to be false.

The more we consider, the more we shall see the necessity of *all* the essentials I have insisted on, to constitute true and perfect poetry in any of its degrees. Though, in point of fact, a great deal has been taken by bad judges for poetry, which has no imagination, yet, in theory, no one has ever been so ignorant as to contend, that imagination is not a primary essential to it.

The *first* difference has arisen upon the meaning applied to the word; some confining it to the impressions of the fancy in

the state in which they have been received from external objects by the perception of the senses, or perhaps confounding it with them; not absolutely requiring the new combinations which a farther intellectual process proceeds to make from those impressions.

The *next* difference is upon the *quality* of the things imagined; some suppose that no regard need be paid to any principle or rule in these formations; that every poet may exercise, at his mere will, his imagination in putting together, in any form he chooses, whatever the stores of his mind can supply; and that the more strange and surprising it is, and the more *unlike* any thing which ever existed in nature, the more genius it shows, and the more excellent it is. Widely as this opinion is entertained, and far as it has been carried in practice, and even attended with temporary success, the answer to it is almost too obvious to be repeated; if this be correct, insanity is the greatest genius, and madmen are the best poets.

It must therefore be not only *imagination* in its *strict* sense, but imagination *qualified* in its kind. It must be, *first*, the imagination of what is *true* or *probable*; *secondly*, of objects which are not merely true or probable, but which convey *delight*. Now the delight is in proportion to the force and dignity of the emotion raised; and the gradations of forceful and dignified emotions are caused by images; 1. of grandeur; 2. of tenderness; 3. of beauty. Genuine poetry, therefore, consists of the invention of images which are true or probable; and its gradations of excellence are threefold, —in proportion to the sublimity, or tenderness, or beauty of these images.

This seems to me exceedingly simple; and as undeniable as it is simple. If we admit it, we cannot have much difficulty in deciding which of the productions offered to the public as poetry deserve that character; and in what degree, if they deserve it, they ought to be placed. There may, indeed, be an opening for some little difference as to what is probable or improba-

ble; what is sublime, tender, or beautiful; but the difference on these points will seldom be important; it will merely lie in slight shades of opinion.

Simple and undeniable as it is, I am well aware that there are large and powerful parties who will not admit it; because their interests and passions are opposed to it. It will hurl many who have numerous partisans, from the seat they have usurped.

Many of those who will not go the length of directly denying this definition of genuine poetry, will resist its strict application. There are authors who have some fancy, but, if severely scrutinised, no imagination. These are not poets; but their advocates will contend sturdily for them; and fancy treads, sometimes, so close upon the heels of an imperfect imagination, that it will be difficult to draw such a line as shall absolutely exclude it. A happy simile or metaphor, which is not only just but beautiful, cannot be denied to be imagination; yet, even when it occurs very often in a poem, it is but subordinate; and does

not, in itself, make the structure of the composition imaginative and poetical; and without this it cannot belong to a high order of poetry, whatever may be the merit of particular passages. Yet this position will be obstinately resisted by those whose readers never dreamed of lowering them on such an account. So it is, however, that simile and metaphor are a very inferior class of poetical invention: I do not go the length of excluding them.

They who will perceive that the demand of the *probable* will bear hard upon them, are, in this age, a very numerous class. I have so often touched on the modern rage for the *wonderful*, and its causes, that it is not necessary to dwell much upon it here. This always has been the resort of subordinate and imperfect genius, and always will be. "He," says Johnson, "who forsakes "the probable, may easily find the marvel-"lous." The use of the marvellous is a mode of false excitement, which they who feel intrinsic strength disdain to apply. It does not require that sensibility, that inti-

macy with the laws and operations of our nature, that sagacity, that general knowledge, nor that reflection, reasoning, judgment, and wisdom; all which are required by him who adheres to the *probable*. The very defiance of all these is what contrives combinations which are most fitted to raise *wonder*. It is the extravagance and perversity, the utter unlikeness to life and experience, and to what the natural course of our thoughts could conceive, which acts as a stimulant to the dull or palled attention of those on whom the finer semblances of the natural and the true are lost.

There is, however, something so tempting in this indulgence of the fantastical and the monstrous, when the public are inclined to receive it favourably, that men of undoubted genius have sometimes yielded to it. The novelty it offers has a sort of strong momentary attraction; it gives chances, or rather hopes, of unexpected brilliance, which the more beaten paths do not at first appearance seem so likely to offer; it throws out a glare of deceitful light, which it re-

quires a very sound, cool judgment immediately to penetrate and dispel; and the gratification it affords to vanity by the strong, though transient, impulse it conveys to others, is more seducing than the lively sensibility of genius can always resist. They, whose better taste would tell them better, sometimes reconcile themselves to these delusions by crying, "*Qui vult decipi, de-*" *cipiatur.*" This is not, indeed, exactly the manner in which Campbell accounts for it in *Cowley*. He says, "His unnatural flights "arose less from affectation than self-de-" ception. He cherished false thoughts as "men often associate with false friends, not "from insensibility to the difference be-" tween truth and falsehood, but from being "too indolent to examine the difference." Johnson, however, says nearly the same: he observes that he indulged *in a certain way to present praise without enquiry*. But many, I suspect, err *against* knowledge.

LETTER XXI.

4th August, 1824.

NOTWITHSTANDING all that has been said about *imagination*, it will be yet subject to many cavils, and some difficulties. Not only the *quality*, but the *quantity* or *degree* of it may be disputed. The *invented* part may consist merely in the associations, and not in the images to which they are associated; and, indeed, as it is the poet's business to deal more with spirit than with matter, so these associations, by which he embodies the more evanescent existences of sentiment and passion, form a main and prime part of his fictions. But still, to make the invention perfect, the images which give rise to these associations should be *feigned* also. I mean, for instance, not only that the thoughts, reflections, and sentiments, which a magnificent scene would awaken in a rich mind, should be embodied

and affixed to it, but that the scéne itself should be created by the imaginative faculty.

I am aware, that this principle must not be universally applied with extreme strictness and severity, because it would exclude many productions to which we cannot bring ourselves to refuse the praise of poetical merit. The feelings which the poet sometimes describes from his own immediate experiences, when he delineates the objects which give rise to them, are of this kind. I believe, however, that whatever such poems represent themselves to be, they will, when impressive by their excellence, be almost always found to be the results of imagined circumstances; and if they seem to be those of immediate experience, they are, in truth, nothing more than the combinations of past experiences stored up in the fancy.

Whatever is *copied* from reality, from that which has actually happened, has always something servile and hard in it. It is embarrassed with accidental and disagree-

able particularities, and never forms such a free, bold, and breathing picture as poetry requires. Sometimes the poet draws delightful scenes, which are represented to be those *of memory*, but they are not in truth so; they are strictly the pictures of his *imagination* built with the *stores* of his memory. It may be asked, why I use in this case the word *memory* rather than the word *fancy*. I know that some able psychologists confound them; to *me* they appear to have a strong and essential distinction. *Memory* is not an original impression of the mind, but merely the *duration* of an impression. A clear and perfect impression may be received by one person from external objects, which, while it lasts, can reflect vividly to the intellect the images received, but which may soon be effaced; this is lively fancy. An imperfect and dim impression may be received by another person of a different sort of ability, which can give only a dull reflection, but yet may endure long; this is weak fancy, but strong memory. A third person may have both

fancy and memory. A poet, therefore, whose imagination works with the stores of memory, works with such stores of fancy as have been long treasured up, and have a reference to time. But there is a *verbal* memory, as Dugald Stewart remarks, which does not so much retain impressions of *images*, as of the words which are the types of them. The necessary and obvious result of this is more sound than meaning, and an address rather to the ear than to the mind.

The writers of verse who belong to this class are innumerable; their impressions are not original, but derivative; and, though it is strange, so it is, that these derivative impressions endure *long* and with great exactness, which I take to be a confirmatory proof, that it is a memory of *words*, rather than of *ideas;* for by some law of our nature, words are longest and most easily remembered by feeble intellects.

Pope says,

> Where powers of bright imagination play,
> The memory's soft figures die away.

Dr. Aikin, in his *Letters to his Son*, is very angry at this position of the poet: but all experience proves it true, and the reason seems obvious; a fertile imagination is always creating new impressions which efface the old, as one wave of the sea overruns another. I think Dr. Aikin asks, how imagination can build without memory. He might, perhaps, correctly have asked, how science, and some other departments of knowledge, can proceed without memory; but imagination in a great measure creates its own materials, except so far as the *prima stamina* of its ingredients are supplied by the *endurance* of the impressions of the fancy; and such endurance I must admit to be *memory*. But in this there is not enough of memory to destroy the solidity of *Pope*'s position. The impressions of *fancy* scarcely ever endure with that *identity* which gives them strictly the character of *memory;* they very early suffer the interference of imagination; and in a little while, though they do not lose their vividness, but rather augment in it, they change

their nature, and become rather impressions of imagination than of fancy.

And this is precisely what constitutes the difficulty, and perhaps injustice, of excluding the reflections of the *fancy* from the title of *invention*. Almost all bright fancy borders upon invention, and partakes of it; and it may, therefore, be conceded, that they who deal in it *only* are still poets, and only vary from great poets in *degree*. I rather think that an external image *never* does, in fact, make what may be called a *fac-simile* impression on a poetical mind; even if it does, the busy intellect will, in half an hour, be sufficiently at work upon it to make an essential alteration in it. If so, the memory will have little opportunity to display itself on a poetical fancy; and the position of *Pope* will be found to be even still more correct than I set out with asserting it to be.

But of those who deal in the derivative stores of the mind, it is not extraordinary that there should be an enduring memory of the impressions; that is, that the impres-

sions should continue the same. They cannot go a step beyond their teachers; and they have no busy intellect of their own to derange the particulars and the order of what they have thus learned; whatever, therefore, the impression has been, it remains undisturbed and the same. There is, moreover, in what is derived from intellectual productions already embodied in language a great deal of mechanical aid to exactness of impression and exactness of recollection. There is a *memoria technica;* and it is notorious, that there is nothing in which this art deals so much as in *words.* There are authors without one original power of the mind, who can pour out mechanical verses with an inexhaustible vein. Let an acute critic examine these verses, and he will trace with the most unqualified certainty the echo of mere *words* impressed by the author's study of original writers; to which words, from the use made of them, from the jumbled combination, and the utter want of any intelligible train of ideas, it will be demonstrable that no distinct

images or thoughts are affixed. It is possible they may excite some confused activity in the writer's brain; but the words are only suggested, and follow one another by some *mechanical link*. Or if we admit that they convey to the author's mind the ideas which they properly represent, still in such authors the words lead the thoughts, and not the thoughts the words.

There is scarce any class of writers more contemptible than these. All false pretence is always disgusting in itself; and doubly so, because it has a tendency to degrade what is true, by exposing it to be confounded with the false, by the ignorant multitude. An imitator has always about him something of levity and littleness, which in the confusion with real genius that is sure to ensue among the ignorant, spreads the contagion of its contempt upon those who are imitated.

In taking *fancy* to be a faculty which operates in the manner I have supposed probable, it yet would be dangerous to let it assume a seat too near to pure invention.

He who confines himself to the results of experience in the main ingredients of his fancy, will at least have a very narrow range; witness *Cowper*, whose *Task*, with all its beauties, and all the poet's fertility of sentiment, touches very few of the great and most affecting features of life. A calm, domestic, rural life in a country village, though situated where no grand features of nature mark the landscape, offers very many innocent, complacent, and delightful scenes; but not any which fill the mind with violent and sublime emotions. Nor was Cowper's genius peculiarly fitted for such, if they had offered; much less was his imagination fitted to create them. He was of a gentle, tender, timid temperament; and loved more a serene sunshine than the magnificence of nature in a storm. His taste lay in a smiling, colloquial, good-natured humour; his melancholy was a black and diseased melancholy, not a grave and rich contemplativeness. He had no ambition; and, I think, no enthusiasm, except that which was bred by his disease. It is

unhappy when men of sensitive fancy cannot travel beyond themselves; when they cannot call in imagination to vary their impressions, to purify the atmosphere in which they breathe when it has gathered vapours, and to free them from the liability to be bound and overwhelmed by surrounding circumstances. A man of energetic imagination has resources by which he can rise in some degree above the caprices of fortune.

But this is not because imagination lives upon delusions. To suppose that poets are less in search of truth than philosophers, is to draw the opinion from bad poetry. Imagination may be exercised to create falsehood, but it is an absurd inconsequence, to conclude, therefore, that it *must* deal in falsehood; pure imagination is so much the reverse, that it is the lamp of truth. The result of experiment is partial; it is imagination only which can take a range sufficiently extended to form a broad basis for truth.

Theories of poetry and rules of criticism

have tended much to depress the freedom of poetical genius. Many authors have puzzled themselves as to the purposes and ends of poetry, and many as to the modes. Some have hesitated between the exercise of the *fancy* and of the *imagination;* and some have limited themselves to mere observation in preference to either. These last have been fully impressed with the legitimate *end*, but have unluckily mistaken the *means*. Thus Pope, having a grave and solid mind, and anxious for the dignity of his art, but unfortunately taking *fiction* in the unfavourable sense, proposed truth as the end of his poetical endeavours; but, thus misled, did not always adopt the most poetical modes of effecting his purpose.

LETTER XXII.

5th August, 1824.

LAST night I cast my eyes on Burke's Essay on the *Sublime and Beautiful.* Many years have elapsed since I have read this work attentively, and it requires much attention; but the slight reperusal I gave to the introductory chapter on *Taste* induces me to add my assent to it; and I am not aware that I have said any thing in these letters which in any degree conflicts with it. There are other parts of the volume, especially a chapter or two at the end about *poetry,* with which I cannot agree. But I believe it is now generally thought that the illustrious author is not equally solid and correct in all parts of this very acute and original disquisition. It is a wonderful performance, especially for the early age at which it was written; and shows that the author, as profound as eloquent, would have been as eminent in

psychology and metaphysics as in politics, if he had continued to bend his inimitable mind to those pursuits.

Among the various excellences of this peculiar and unrivalled author, is his perfect originality. It will be proper to explain what I mean by *originality*,—for there is a great difference in the meaning, which both authors and the public affix to this word. I call every thing original, which is *not borrowed*,—which results from the operations of the author's own mind. Many persons admit nothing to be original which is *not new*, — which has ever been said before. Surely this is a most absurd limitation of the sense. There are few important truths, especially in morals, which can have been left undeveloped till so late an age of the world. "Those writers," says Johnson on Cowley, "who lay on the watch for "novelty could have little hope of great-"ness; for great things cannot have es-"caped former observations." But the value of what is said by an original writer, when the same opinion or sentiment has

been given by others, consists in recognition and confirmation. It is another testimony to the truth of the thought. It follows from this, that the agreement ought to regard things important in themselves, and on which there may be difference of opinion. Stale common-place is not endurable. If it be *new* as well as *just*, it will have greater value; but the most original writer can say little new which is just. There is, however, always some minor novelty in what is original; at least novelty of manner, and freshness.

What classes of writers in their different departments are most valuable, and deserve best of literature, is a very interesting question. There are few original writers even in the more indulgent sense I have given to the word. One author borrows from another, if not the very words, yet the ideas, which he endeavours to disguise by some change of expression; or, perhaps, is not himself aware of the origin of his thoughts, when it is sufficiently palpable to others. Men capable of thinking for them-

selves, sometimes in mere haste and idleness, echo the opinions of others; and even become compilers of the *stalest* things, when the least effort would supply them with something which would have, at least, freshness of manner. Thus it is with the *Lives of the English Poets;* since Johnson's time, we not only do not meet with a new opinion, but scarcely with an additional one; yet, whatever merit Johnson had as a biographer and a critic, he surely did not exhaust the subject.

It requires time and practice, even with great abilities, to venture upon original thoughts and expressions, unless the author be presumptuous and rash, and then he rushes into extravagance and absurdity. Some authors, gifted with original powers, never exert them, either from indolence, or want of courage, or accidental habits, for the use of them does not come at once; and the strongest faculties feel themselves embarrassed and uneasy at the outset of arranging, embodying, and recording their own thoughts. By degrees the ideas fall

into order, perplexities clear up; every day sees the prospect both multiply and widen; and expressions rise up with the ideas, unstudied and unsought. He who, acting in this way, looks back, after an interval, to the point from which he set out, will be astonished at his own progress. But if we accustom ourselves to rely on others, and only to think as we are taught, we shall always be at the mercy of the last author whom we read; and if we read irregularly, shall make no progress even in our acquired knowledge, because the infusion of one day will efface that of the preceding.

We scarcely ever meet with a writer on a temporary topic, who has any genuine originality. He has been acted upon factitiously by the surrounding temperament, and he has imbibed ideas unconsciously from the general stream of opinions and arguments: an original mind will not mix in these things, because it feels that in the hubbub it is impossible to be undisturbed in its own operations, and to think for itself. A mere ready man attributes to *himself* the

thoughts which were imposed by *circumstances*, and seizes his pen to teach others what he delusively persuades himself are original, instead of being borrowed from the very public which he stands forward to teach. The delusion vanishes with the circumstances which gave rise to it; and on looking back on it, every one is astonished that any cleverness could ever have been found in what now appears so hollow and flat. This is especially true of subjects of politics, in which more temporary ferments prevail than on any other topics. Perhaps there exists no political pamphlets, except those of Burke, which, after the period that gave birth to them, have retained the least attraction. And it is, perhaps, a strict and unaccountable, as well as admirable singularity in this great man, that with a strong impetuosity of temper, on a subject in which all his passions were most heated, such was his integrity, his wisdom, and the command of his intellect, that neither his facts, his arguments, his opinions, nor his language, were suffered to be car-

ried away by the delusion of temporary views, in concerns which have never failed to give false excitement to the coldest and dullest hearts of others.

Upon these coarse topics of vulgar discussion, great talkers with technical memories, and loud animal spirits, overwhelm sensitive genius. It is impossible to repel them, for they talk by rote, and do not feel the force of an original answer. The science of politics is in itself beautiful, but not the *practical* squabble among *parties* for power. Burke perhaps is the only man who ever united the two in a very high degree. Indeed Burke is in so many brilliant and illustrious respects *unique*, that he stands both in literature and in politics *alone*,— unequalled, unimitated, and inimitable. His life has never yet been properly written; even his character has never yet been adequately drawn. He lived among men not deficient in such lustre as common times produce. *Sheridan* had talent, wit, eloquence, but he had no heart; and his talents, acquirements, genius, were

as immeasurably inferior to *Burke*'s as his heart. What were *Pitt* or *Fox*, in the permanent fruits of mind, compared with *Burke?*

To live in the rough air of the political world, and yet to retain all the sensibilities of the higher regions of literature, perhaps never happened, except to Burke. Some will contend that this happened to *Fox*. I think not: the style of his *Historical Fragment* proves that it did not. *Pitt* had no feeling for literature; I doubt whether any addiction to it would have put him in the highest class; it certainly would not have made him a great *poet*.

A politician is scarcely one whose fame much outlasts his life; he leaves no fruits behind him,—at least, no *embodied* fruits (if I may so say). Lord Clarendon lives, but he lives in his *History*. Bacon lives as a *philosopher*, not as a Lord Chancellor. Johnson is in every one's hands; we refer to him, and cite him daily. The director of our opinions, the authority for our sentiments, forms a part of our being: when

we want light, we apply to his lamp; he tells us what judgment to make, and on what principles to make it; whom to follow in our intellectual pleasures, and to what extent to give our admiration to them; whose false splendours to reject; and whom to take to our bosoms in moments of soberness and reason. His stream of wisdom is not a temporary burst from the melting of a casual sun, but a perpetual current from a permanent fountain always equally clear, full, and strong,

"Which runs, and as it runs, for ever will run on."

His matter is all essence, purified from all that is adventitious; and therefore he is no more the author of one age than of another. Such must be taken to be the proof of unqualified genius, because it shows that no part of the stores was derived from accident, circumstances, and fortuitous opportunity. Few authors stand thus independent and alone. Accident goes far to form all common authors; he who is not original must always be temporary; he

cannot distinguish what is extrinsic from what is intrinsic, and, therefore, he confounds perishable with imperishable materials. Not that all who are original use permanent matter, and are of permanent fame. To attain this, the originality must be combined with soundness and judgment; and it must be an originality in things intrinsically important, expressed with simplicity and force.

A *catalogue raisonnée* of original writers, even if it were confined to a single country, would be amusing, curious, and instructive. A mere compiler would not be able to form it; — it would itself require not only great reading, but much original and critical sagacity.

LETTER XXIII.

6th August, 1824.

BURKE has said, that "poetry does not "depend for its effect on the power "of raising sensible images."* Had he said, "depend SOLELY," he would have been, perhaps, correct; but his position is not merely expressed faultily, his reasonings on it are very unsatisfactory. He seems to think that the pleasure consists in the *words* when they do not convey ideas, or at least images; but he equivocates between the two; and the poetry of *Blacklock*, the blind poet, is brought by him to illustrate his opinion: unluckily this would rather prove that Blacklock's is not genuine poetry, than that genuine poetry can consist of words without ideas. It seems to me that Burke was misled, by perceiving

* Sublime and Beautiful, p. v. § 5.

the error commonly entertained, that poetry is *confined* to raising *images only*, and that the best poetry deals in words which convey something very different from images: he says, "The business of poetry is to "display rather the effects of things on "the mind of the speaker, or of others, "than to present a clear idea of the things "themselves." If he had said, "to pre-"sent the effects of things, AS WELL AS a "clear idea of the things themselves," he would have been accurate. Poetry deals in *immaterialities*, as well as in *images*; but then these immaterialities either result from images, or are embodied by the poet into the semblance of them.

But I will wave in this place any further discussion of this subtle point, because Burke is an author not to be lightly answered; and it would not take one letter, but several, or rather, perhaps, the space of a volume, to enter duly on all the topics which Burke's two or three sections on this position raise.

This difficulty, however, suggests one important observation. It shows to us, that the nature of poetry is not a question so trite and exhausted as many would have it to be, and that it cannot be idle to endeavour still to investigate and explain one of the most important topics in literature, on which such a mind as Burke's could entertain doubts or singular opinions.

Dr. *Joseph Warton* was an exquisite scholar, of very general reading, a man of the purest taste, and of some genius; yet it is obvious, that he had not clearly settled in his own mind the theoretic principles of poetry, otherwise he would not have wavered in so feeble a manner, in finally drawing up a summary of the poetical merits of POPE, in his elegant *Essay* on that poet. *Johnson* was a man of stronger and mightier grasp, and infinitely more acute discrimination, though of far less sensitive and refined taste; and he has accordingly analysed the ingredients of Pope's genius with admirable acuteness, truth, and eloquence.

Treatises without number have been published ON POETRY in the course of half a century, but most, even of those which obtained any notice, are forgotten; for they were either trite, or if new, not just. The most original are the *Prefaces of Wordsworth*, which seem also to me to be mainly well founded; it is a frankness which I owe to myself to say, that I differ from him in one or two essentials. There are also several incidental critical opinions in *Campbell's Specimens* very elegantly expressed, and of a pure as well as highly cultivated taste; but there are others very careless; and some, I think, not a little prejudiced.

I doubt, if any thing of a consistent theory can be drawn even from the best *critical Journals;* they are written by various hands, and on the spur of the occasion, without a reference to any one standard. And those of the present day are more especially written rather in the spirit of an *advocate* than of a *judge*. On looking

back, it will be seldom found, that time has sanctioned these judgments.

It seems that the impressions of the moment are almost always overcoloured by a degree of false excitement; and that truth, which alone is permanent, is sober, and commonly appears to the factitious humour of those who are only moved by present circumstances, even dull. The past and the future are nothing to these people; they do not live in an intellectual world, the pressure of matter only operates on their perception; and they either do not possess or do not employ any farther faculty.

How far knowledge, and how far rectitude of thought, tends to happiness, may admit of many opinions, or many shades of opinion. Cowper has said, that *knowledge* is not *wisdom:* and he distinguishes them by defining one to be acquired intelligence; the other, to be that which is the result of the operations of a *man's own mind.* But admitting a great deal of what the poet says in this passage to be correct, it may be observed, that *knowledge* cannot thus be

put in opposition to *wisdom*, on the ground of its being *acquired*, because wisdom is truth; and therefore *knowledge* is *wisdom*, if *true*, even though acquired. The conviction of what we learn from others is perhaps not always, or even generally, so strong as of that which arises from the process of our own minds; but so far as it is conviction, it is wisdom, if it be the conviction of a truth. Now, surely, we may derive a perfect conviction from the reasonings of another mind.

Providence has ordained that knowledge, so far as it is just, should give us intrinsic satisfaction. It is like the removal of a heavy air or vapour from us, which enables us immediately to breathe more freely. Clouds are always oppressive to us, and there is a pain in seeing darkly. What Burke applies to outward darkness may be applied to the darkness of the mind. He says, "In utter "darkness, it is impossible to know in what "degree of safety we stand; we are igno- "rant of the objects that surround us; we "may every moment strike against some

"dangerous obstruction; we may fall down "a precipice the first step we take; and if "an enemy approach, we know not in what "quarter to defend ourselves: in such a "case strength is no sure protection; wis- "dom can only act by guess; the boldest "are staggered; and he who would pray "for nothing else towards his defence, is "forced to pray for light." Thus it is, that moral knowledge operates to set us at our ease. Yet knowledge opens to us many evils of life, which perhaps might otherwise be veiled to us; and *Gray* has pathetically and beautifully said,

"Why should we know our fate,
Since sorrow never comes too late?
——— Where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise."

Sometimes I would wish to shut my mind to the fresh convictions which every day brings of the injustice, the dishonesty, and the deceitfulness of the world; to the frightful truth, that simplicity and fair dealing cannot save itself, much less advance itself; that we cannot be happy or safe

without playing the cards which the world plays; yet that every sensitive, virtuous, and dignified mind must be tortured in playing them.

Our thoughts seem sometimes to visit us only for the purpose of perplexity and irritation, and we plunge into whatever overcomes or distracts thought by bodily exertion or sensual enjoyment. Thus Lord Byron says of *Lara*:—

> "Woman—the field—the ocean—all that gave
> Promise of pleasure, peril of a grave,
> In turn he tried;———————
> ———————for his feelings sought
> In that intenseness an escape from thought."

If Lord Byron drew himself in *Lara*, he should not have said an "escape from "thought," but an escape from *disagreeable* thoughts *only*; for no one more delighted in thought than Lord Byron, or more indulged in it. The major part of his existence, from the age of twenty, must have passed in thought. Such nicety of observation, such profundity of sentiment, such depth of reflection, could only be the

fruits of perpetual and unwearied thought; so much so, that it raises wonder that he could ever find much leisure for sensual enjoyments. When we recollect how much virtue there was in the better parts of his life, it was surely unpardonable to load him with the reproaches under which he suffered; and that, while men who have passed their days in sleep, and their nights at the gambling-house, reckless of fortune and of all that is estimable in life, live on without indignation, or painful notice.

LETTER XXIV.

7th August, 1824.

THE poet to whose genius *Campbell*, in his *Specimens*, has paid most lengthened attention, and whom he has treated with most favour, is COWPER. This is the more pleasing, because Campbell's *own* school of poetry has little likeness to Cowper's. The memoir contains some very elegant and beautifully written criticism; but still it assumes principles of poetical excellence to which I cannot quite accede. It is rather an ungracious attempt to oppose the critic on the ground he has taken; but precision and certainty in the principles of poetry is of more importance than the charm of a few detached passages, however deeply attractive from their moral virtue as well as their elegance. The main passage to which I allude is this: — "We instantly recognize "the true poet in the clearness, sweetness,

"and fidelity of his scenic draughts; in his "power of giving novelty to what is com- "mon; and in the high relish, the exqui- "site enjoyment of rural sights and sounds, "which he communicates to the spirit." Now this is very delightful; but it does not, therefore, follow that it describes the proper power of the true poet. If *invention* be the poet's grand faculty it certainly does not.

Let us examine this curious and difficult subject a little more minutely. It is *the fidelity of a scenic draught;* that is, it is a direct copy from nature, of which a great part of the excellence lies in the clearness and exactness. So far the *poet* does not go beyond the *painter;* he paints with *words* instead of *colours*, which are the more perfect medium: indeed he does not even go so far as the painter who executes from *invention.* It may be said, that there is something more intellectual in the application of *words* than of *colours:* I see no satisfactory reason for this. Then the taste exercised in the choice of features is, at least, equal in

the painter. Perhaps, however, it is *the relish, the exquisite enjoyment,* of the images described, which the poet *communicates to the reader's spirit.* This he undoubtedly may do by associating and embodying *sentiment and reflection* to the images; but not by *pure description alone.* Let us then repeat one of the passages which Campbell has chosen to illustrate his praise:

"Here Ouse, slow-winding through a level plain
Of spacious meads with cattle sprinkled o'er,
Conducts the eye along his sinuous course
Delighted. There, fast rooted in their bank,
Stand, never overlook'd, our favourite elms,
That screen the herdsman's solitary hut;
While far beyond, and overthwart the stream,
That, as with molten glass, inlays the vale,
The sloping land recedes into the clouds;
Displaying on its varied side the grace
Of hedge-row beauties numberless, square tower,
Tall spire, from which the sound of cheerful bells
Just undulates upon the listening ear,
Groves, heaths, and smoking villages, remote."

Now I cannot perceive that there is any thing here which a painter could not, or would not, represent, with at least equal

effect by colours. Here is nothing of what Burke states to be the province of poetry; — *the display of the effects of things on the mind of the speaker, or of others.* Nor is the other passage which Campbell cites, as conveying *the freshness and delight of a morning walk,* more so.

Last night I saw the glories of the setting sun in more than usual splendour over Mont-Blanc, and the summits of the long range of Alpine heights on each side of it. The clouds rolled in mighty golden billows of every shape and hue, and detached into numerous grand divisions would have formed a richer picture than a painter ever yet exhibited, without descending to earth below, — the very tops of the ridgy mountains, lifting their rosy-tinged heads above the lowest line of arrowy vapours, that continued to change their hues and forms faster than the eye could follow. If I could describe these adequately, I should still not give proof of the prime faculty of a poet. There would be no *invention.* But let me add to them a train of visionary feelings

and sentiments, and embody them in language equal to the thoughts, then I should display the poetical power; then I should put forth those faculties in which lies the superiority of the poet over the painter.

It will probably be answered, that Campbell himself closes his criticism with the praise of Cowper for "his powers as a "moral poet;" the powers "of inculcating "those truths and affections which make "the heart feel itself better and more "happy." But then these truths and affections ought to be inculcated by poetical means, and with poetical warmth.

Lord Byron unquestionably estimated *Cowper* much too low in calling him *no poet*. But many others have put him much too high, if we are to pay any consistent regard to principles. An author may be a very ingenious writer; he may impart delight, and instruction, and virtue; he may possibly even do more good, and charm more, than most good poetry can do; but all these merits will not, in themselves, make what he does to be *poetry;* because

the good done by *poetry* must be done by *imaginative invention.* Without this, let it be as excellent as it will, to call it *poetry* is to confound names and essences.

I have thus strongly insisted on these nice points, because it seems to me necessary to keep constantly in mind these essential distinctions which the *unqualified* praises of Cowper have a strong tendency to obliterate; but I admit the subject to be a very subtle one, and *Cowper* to be an author peculiarly formed to increase the difficulty. The consideration of him raises the question of all those evanescent lines that separate the approximations between poetical fancy and poetical imagination. A painter of particular and local landscapes, or portraits, copies directly from external objects; but a describer in words, who means it to be poetry, scarcely ever (if ever) does; he copies from the *internal* impression made on the fancy. I have said, in a former letter, that this internal impression seems almost always to submit to some alteration, and to be encroached upon by

the imagination. When, therefore, the pictures reflected from Cowper's *fancy* have the strong effect of poetry, this may be the reason. But, unfortunately, it is their *fidelity* which is insisted on as the characteristic merit; and this brings them back to *strict* fancy. Campbell says, that "he was careless of selecting and refining his views of nature beyond their casual appearance;" and that "he sought not to embellish what he loved."

Surely these passages are inconsiderately expressed, because they shut us out from the only opening to bring *Cowper*'s nearer to the proper principle. That *words* cannot describe external objects better than *colours* must, I think, be admitted: the poet's superiority over the painter must lie in the *selection* of images more agreeable to the intellect, and more capable of being received by it; the appeal is more purely *from* the intellect *to* the intellect. Poetry can raise no images in the minds of others, but by the medium of their fancy; nor even thus, perhaps, unless these images are drawn

from the reflections of the poet's fancy or imagination, rather than directly from external perceptions. But a picture is, itself, an external object exhibited to the senses of others.

Cowper, therefore, *must* use *selection;* he may not use embellishment, or addition, or transposition and altered combination; but so far as he does not use them (with due regard to *verisimility*) his poetry is less poetical. I take it that, in fact, his *choice* of images constitutes his poetical charm; more especially when combined with those simple, beautiful, and proper, not overloaded, epithets, which join intellectual interests to what is material. Thus, when describing the *gorse* of the heath he tells us it is *shapeless and deformed, and dangerous to the touch, yet decked with bloom and ornaments of gold,* he points out a contrast which might have escaped, at least, a dull spectator. It is in this sort of charm, above all others, that the poetry of *Gray's Elegy* consists: it has not an epithet that does not point out to us the leading feature of

the rural image; and rarely in a way that does not awaken *sentiment* and *moral* associations. Only examine the stanza, "Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade," and all this will be found true of *every* word. It must be admitted, that the *invention* here is in the associations only; so far it is only *mixed invention*. In what cases selected images, judiciously recombined, amount to poetical invention, depends, perhaps, on the extent of space whence they are taken.

But it is our business to adhere, in the first place, to broad general rules, and to palpable unequivocal distinctions. *Imaginative invention* is an indispensable requisite of pure poetry; and it is simplest and safest to keep as close as possible to the plain and undisputed meaning of those words. There is a sort of *imaginative invention* which no one can misunderstand, and no one need resort to argument to prove: all that can be said of invention, which is *constructive*, is exposed to a thousand subtleties and cavils, which, after all, caprice may take as it will;

and of which it is impossible to force conviction on any one who chooses to be obstinate or sceptical. It is open to every one's plea of *taste;* whereas adherence to grand undeniable positions, precisely expressed, gives standards which cannot be evaded, and shuts out all those quibbles and cavils which not only produce irritation, but, by introducing uncertainty, cause degradation, and diminish both respect and pleasure. The merit of all poetry, therefore, is in proportion to the quantity of *imaginative invention*, taken in its simple sense, provided it preserves verisimility; and is either sublime, or tender, or beautiful.

Nothing is more common than to hear persons found an argument as to the proper qualities of poetry, on their ideas of what is most useful, or what is most suited to their own taste. If they could prove themselves right in their own ideas of usefulness or pleasure, still, if it was not *invention*, it would not be *poetry*, though it might be something *better*.

But the *use*, as well as *delight*, of PROBABLE FICTION, will not admit of rational dispute. Imagination, under the restraint of reason, is by far the highest faculty of the mind. It operates in a coarser way, and inferior degree, through all human existence; it supplies the materials of our best and most extensive moral knowledge; and it incalculably heightens and refines all our enjoyments; but it also sometimes aggravates our sorrows, though; at other times, it is a balm to them, or affords an escape from them. All the highest eloquence must be inspired by imagination; all that is most lively, most energetic, most sublime, most passionate, most profound in poetry, must flow from it; all else must be comparatively dim, partial, and superficial; observation must be narrow and deceitful; and fancy must be limited, accidental, and embarrassed by innumerable obstructions and counterbalances, and must partake too much of the evils and frailties of reality. It is in imagination only that the spirit of true genius lives; that the nobler ambitions

of our nature have play, and that we aspire to that higher order of our existence for which the better part of our nature is formed.

It is only in the mind that any pure and unalloyed pleasure is to be found; in the cup of reality there is always mixed up a quantity of coarse dregs and of disappointment, if not of bitterness; the *fancy* by which the reflection is made, necessarily catches something of the vapours that exhale from what it reflects. Imagination combines its ingredients afresh, and admits not the accident of impure and corrupt ingredients; but forms the nectar pure as if from celestial springs. There are those who would say, that to indulge ourselves in the repose by Elysian waterfalls when we must so soon be called back to the ruder scenes of actual life, and be tied to daily occupations of an uncongenial nature, is but to unfit us for our duties, and to refine our senses at the expence of our happiness. If the tendency of mankind was rather to aspire too high than to *deturpate*, there

might be some plausibility in this argument. When there is any sound reason for believing that mankind are likely to become too good for the world, then let the beautiful and alluring fictions of poetry be interdicted.

LETTER XXV.

8th August, 1824.

If we could so regulate our labours as to be every day of our lives, after manhood, or even at a late period, in a progression of knowledge, however small, we might have some marks by which to count the lapse of time as a gain, and receive a feeling of complacence, where we now experience only dissatisfaction and regret. Knowledge is, of course, of various kinds and degrees. That which is knowledge to the individual acquiring it, though known to many others, is, if not trifling in its quality, still a great gain to *himself;* few can hope to discover or develope what is positively new, and at the same time just; and if it be not just, its novelty is but a fault instead of a merit. There are degrees of novelty also; when he who thinks strongly and justly communicates a thought which has sprung from the

processes of his own intellect, it has commonly something of freshness and novelty of manner, at least, even when others have often anticipated the idea. But there are men who, if they cannot add something positively new *every* day, may, by ability and unremitted industry, do so frequently. If there be such men, and if they exert this industry uninterruptedly for some years, how surprising will be their advance from the point at which they set out. It is a necessary incident of this regularity *vires acquirere eundo;* it is not the mere quantity which increases,—the power increases. The ambition to say what has not been said before may seem hopeless if we limit it to truth; but I do not think that it is so. That which is in *contradiction* to the opinions sanctioned by ages is always suspicious; but new developements, explanations, and illustrations, are in no degree hopeless.

If we examine the incidental doctrines, or even regular disquisitions, of men of ability and genius on topics which require

any nicety of thinking, we shall find, by degrees, that much has been carelessly and imperfectly, and much inaccurately said. Innumerable things which seem plausible, or even unanswerable at first, will not bear the close scrutiny of an acute mind. I have sometimes, by progressive attention, discovered this with astonishment. What first struck me as original, forcible, and well founded, turned out, when I investigated it with severity, to be nothing more than what was at once trite and blundering, under the disguise of an elegant dress. Even men of ability and genius do not give themselves time to think with sufficient intenseness to master subjects as they might. No subject of importance is fathomed without repeated and habitual intenseness.

Yet there are many minds (perhaps the majority of minds) not made for this; minds which continued application rather confuses than enlightens. These are of weak faculties, and are shut from the capacity of deep knowledge; perhaps they are not unhappy at their dimness, because it may bring with

it the delusion that solaces it. Where there is power of knowledge, there is commonly restlessness to acquire it; the mind struggles against twilight, and is impatient to throw off incumbent darkness. Step by step, one cloud cleared after another, we go on from day to day, till, in a course of time, a large extent of prospect appears distinctly before us, which at first was all confusion. But are we thus happier than those who use glasses, and can, besides, discriminate objects only as they are pointed out to them, and want judgment to select by any act of their own minds? At least the happiness and power are of a different kind.

Borrowed knowledge is gained more quickly, but it is not so exact, so solid, nor so permanent. If it costs less difficulty and pains to acquire, it gives much less pleasure when acquired. But much that appears *original* in the quickness of conversation would be detected as *derivative* were it put upon paper. Nothing is so rare as originality; not one in twenty of those who have

the credit of it possesses it; and of those who pretend to it many had better refrain, because they are deficient in the power to pursue it successfully. Yet a memory indiscriminately loaded is a very foolish thing; and knowledge wrongly applied is, perhaps, worse than ignorance. No one ought to learn more than he can digest, for, instead of augmenting what he already knew, it will only confound it. A little correct knowledge is better than a multitudinous mass of loose ideas and inaccurate facts.

No discipline can give force, liveliness, sagacity, and nice discrimination, to a mind naturally dull. Where the senses are obtuse, or where that original gift of intellect which combines its materials is wanting, no industry, study, and art, can supply imagination. But on two minds gifted equally by nature, the difference effected by discipline is literally beyond calculation. Mere unaided nature will do but little. Providence has ordained that much should still be brought forth by labour. Genius, which has blazed to the world, has sometimes *ap-*

peared idle; it has not, in truth, been idle; genius is at work unseen, and intensely occupied when the world deems it vacant. It is its power of relying on its own resources which makes its operations so secret; it is not dependent on books or conversation, or any of the parade of knowledge. Perhaps it may be said that *memory* can do the same; but memory cannot, like genius, *create* the materials which the occasion of the *moment* demands.

I use *memory* synonymously with *recollection*, as the continuance or renewal of impressions already received, whether directly or derivatively; if directly, it is the memory of *fancy;* but still fancy is *not* genius.

A poetical imagination may, perhaps, seem to derive less from that discipline which consists of study than any other mental faculty; but still it derives a great deal more than is suspected. Its combinations cannot be made with *verisimility*, unless under the guidance of deep and varied wisdom. It may be said, that those

which are offered as representations of all nature, except humanity, may be effected by the common observations of the senses. This is inaccurate; the observation must be nice, and the features discriminated and selected with strong feeling and refined taste. But when we come to mankind, (and without human interest what is poetry?) then what intuitive perception and profundity of thought is required? It is necessary to be intimate with all the movements of the heart, and all its strange associations. It is an absurd abuse of minor ingenuity to represent not emotions experienced generally in right of some principle common to our nature, but some whimsical and eccentric courses of passion or thought which the inventor's crude desire of novelty prefers to them.

Does the scenery of nature appear otherwise to a poet than to common eyes? If it does not, it may be asked, what he can communicate which is not already seen by them? But he imbibes the view with more force and brilliance, and enjoys it with

more intenseness; he selects its most striking points with more skill, and by his power of words communicates his own perception, and his own enthusiasm, to the reader. This is the praise which Campbell gives to Cowper. A common gazer may look on a noble landscape, and be generally delighted, but he knows not on what to fix as the leading feature of his delight. Still the poet does not do half his work, if he does not suggest sentiments and reflections touching, apposite, and beautiful. It is by those intellectual associations that he rises himself, and raises his reader above the the visible world. In them he lives, and they every day continue to brighten and multiply, and embody themselves more and more before him. His understanding, as it becomes more exercised, and of more enduring strength, impregnates them from year to year with more appropriate truth; they become more profoundly entertwined with all the plaintive interests of humanity; and the many-coloured events of life give them more richness and more depth of tint.

They who repeat these things as they find them associated by others can never stir the reader's mind with much freshness: here there is room for endless novelty without departing from nature; because the incidents of the lives of individuals vary so much, that they give occasion for inexhaustible variety in the thoughts, reflections, and colourings, which attach themselves to every image, "hang on every tree," and intermingle with every light of the sky. But they who have not the capacity of originality cannot take advantage of these changes; they can discriminate nothing for themselves, nor find new language even if they could discriminate; they dare not trust themselves; they have no confidence in their own emotions or their own choice. Genius, on the contrary, is simple, frank, pure, and fearless.

LETTER XXVI.

9th August, 1824.

FOR twenty-five successive days I have continued to write these letters. I must not break the spell,—and therefore register these few lines; though so much otherwise occupied that I cannot spare time for more.

LETTER XXVII.

10th August, 1824.

I RESUME my task. I could hardly have believed the difficulty of gathering up again a thread dropped but for one day; but this is the first day that I have found myself at a loss; my pen will not run; and the matter comes not, or comes very slow. To me ease and freedom are primary merits. No one writes well under restraint; we feel as little interest in him as in one who talks with cold disguised form. Perhaps some ice or vapour, now and then to arrest the pen, teaches us a useful lesson; we do not value a good till we lose the possession, or are in danger of losing it; the facility with which I commonly write puts it low in my estimation; this morning I feel that it is gone, and now I begin to regret it, and to be dissatisfied. I must not give way; I must venture on, even at the peril of dulness or nonsense.

One moment's loss of self-reliance throws into danger all my energies. The *possunt quia posse videntur* was never more strongly felt by any one than by me, or I should more correctly say the reverse, *non potest quia non posse videtur*. Mine has been a life of a strange fate. I began at twenty-two with rational hopes of a fame not a little gratifying: I have worked for nine-and-thirty years with almost unabated ardour, yet I have made but slight, if any, progress. The great advantage of fame is, that in giving encouragement it gives vigour: the vigour that arises from a just confidence is always beneficial, though hollow conceit may lead to exposure.

The faculties of the mind and temper, which belong to those who are justified in giving themselves up to the pursuits of poetry, are always fitful; and, perhaps, (to use a word a little less favourable,) capricious. It is not permitted to enjoy that flow of delightful temperament which attends the happier moments of imagination without interruption. Our frames are not made

for it: there will be an ebb as well as a flow; and they who would not incur languor and melancholy must not expect high joy.

It is probably not from a native want of strength, but from a want of prudence and skill in the discipline and application of it, that a larger portion of those who are unsuccessful aspirants in the higher branches of literature fail. We ought not to yield to discouragements and obstacles, but move *right onward*, for the effects of perseverance exceed all calculation. It makes even the weak gradually strong; to what a point will it advance those who have natural strength. But when one becomes low spirited and diffident, he wavers between a thousand things instead of pursuing any; he dilutes and dissipates his powers, if he has any; and if he has not, he of course cannot thus acquire any. It may be prudent not to have too contemptuous an opinion of the world; but it is at once disadvantageous and incorrect to have great awe of it. The world, (as Waller says,)

"Like women, born to be controul'd,
Stoops to the forward and the bold."

Who are those that attack us? who are those that take upon themselves to be our judges? Have they any pretension to be our masters or teachers? Or shall we please them the least better by doing as they pretend to desire? It would be like the old man and his jackass, that must, at last, be thrown over the bridge. The critics are men born to object; they live upon it; their trade and occupation would be gone, if they could not find or make objections; they are paid for it as much as a buffoon is paid to make grimaces and jokes, or Harlequin to jump through a tub. It is fear of these people which gives them their power to injure.

It is quite impossible, that what is intrinsically good either in point of genius or reason can be at the *mercy* of any judgment which the interest or passions of such persons choose to pronounce on it. They may affect the sale and the popular opinion, —they cannot alter its nature. To be able

to go even so far is a frightful and atrocious wrong. Still simplicity of purpose followed with unswerving uniformity will defeat all opposition. If I could begin life again with my present knowledge, what a different course of action I should pursue! Vacillation is probably as destructive to good fruits as idleness. With moderate abilities, constancy will do mighty things in a life of any tolerable length.

The first knowledge is the knowledge of human nature in its best aspects; in its worst, alas! it falls below the brutes of the field. In those beautiful appearances which imagination fables, and which may sometimes be found in reality, there is employment for all the affections and all the noblest intellect. The sorrows and difficulties of life but heighten the colours of its pleasures; and shade, and even occasional tempest, are necessary to give variety and zest. But this knowledge is not gained by slight efforts in such a manner as to be capable of due communication. Medi-

tation, watchfulness, exercise, labour, perseverance, are all requisite. Ideas will not embody themselves without effort; they will flit across the mind without impression, and leave no more trace than the course of a bird along the air, or a boat across the ocean: they will follow one another in succession, and the last will be all that exists at the moment, for no one will live beyond the moment. All, therefore, that arises from combination, all that joins the past to the present, or anticipates the future, will be wanting.

The mere skill in style is a comparatively trifling accomplishment. Our prime business is with the importance of the thoughts. There is an irrepressible desire implanted in us; first, to develope; and, secondly, to communicate and compare our impressions. This does not extend itself to what we know to be trite and common to all; it regards only those emotions of the mind which are supposed to be more recondite; and of which each one is not sure before

he has compared them, that they are not peculiar to himself. He, whose attention is engrossed by the skill in style, is less disposed to give himself any pains about this hidden ore; he depends on the ornament of the workmanship for the interest he is to impart. They who read but little, and merely for the amusement of a light understanding, are more caught by manner than by matter,—even what is common and feeble is new to them; and therefore they have two pleasures at once. But it is not only new, it is more easily comprehended; while dressed up as it is in some little novelty of illustration, they are induced to believe that they have late discoveries unveiled to them.

The manner in which literature is conducted in an advanced and corrupt age makes originality every day more and more rare. So much mechanical book-making is introduced, so many inducements are held out to mercenary writers, and superficial knowledge is so widely spread, that innu-

merable persons, neither of native force nor of any true qualifications, engage in this vocation. The consequent degradation of authorship, and the world's confusion of genius with false pretence, is inevitable.

LETTER XXVIII.

11th August, 1824.

THE mists are not retired from the top of *Mont-Blanc*, but I am at my morning task. Were I to live to the age of Methusalem, with my humble faculties not more decayed than they are now, I should still find much to do in the regions of intellect. Thousands and thousands of moral topics, in which I feel an interest, yet remain unpierced by me. Yet I cannot remember, that from the age of fifteen my thoughts, naturally restless, have ever been quite idle. If ambition had been my sole passion, scarce any man can have been more disappointed than I should have been; but luckily I have not only loved literature, but loved it most intensely for its own sake. My reward has been in the occupation which literature gave, and in the scenes it opened to me in solitude; but

low spirits have too commonly made me shrink from the tasks I ought to have grappled with, and content myself with meaner work.

I never was satisfied to take things without examination and reflection; my thoughts were always busy, but I wanted exertion to record them. It is better to give thoughts and facts openly copied from others, than to give insignificant or inaccurate ones of our own; but authors ought to recollect that they must be content to begin weakly, even when their native powers capacitate them to do great things in the end. Genius itself cannot expand without culture and labour.

There is nothing half so glorious, so almost inebriating, as a *well-founded* mastery over the public mind. It is often possessed for a little while by usurpation or by accident; but then it is worth nothing; it is even mischievous, and ends in mortification. But when it has been gained by unequivocal strength duly exerted, it is the mightiest and most dignified of all domi-

nions. The power of thinking rightly and vigorously, of enriching with imagery, and inspiring with sentiment, and then embodying it in language, which is generally acknowledged and submitted to as containing dictates not to be resisted, is a power which must satisfy the most craving pride, and which reason does not call on us to depreciate.

If we are induced by cold argument to conclude that after death a great genius is insensible to the lofty fame he acquired on earth, and to the merits which gained it for him, still what harm can arise from a delusion which encourages such a persuasion in him while here? Will it not act as a spur beyond all others to invigorate his exertions? And all such exertions want continual renewal of the fire: the very richest faculties are subject to frequent languor and exhaustion; the bodily frame is not strong enough for the spirit. And then it is never satisfied: genius never equals its own aspiring desires; it sees something still beyond, which it has not reached; some

rainbow in the distant sky, which it would still run to embrace, and which leaves it restless and pining.

Without the sanction of the world no one can venture to be sure of any extraordinary gifts in himself, because self-love may deceive him; but still there are occasions when he may take confidence in himself at his peril; for it is notorious that the public is not always just; and sometimes leaves the greatest genius in obscurity and unnoticed. But surely there are intrinsic qualities of superiority which can be analysed, clearly ascertained, and almost measured. We do not like to yield to those whom mere accident or mechanical effort has given pretensions of eminence; and if they acquire reputation (however deserved) there is always something little and mean about them, which abases it again; yet not without throwing something of degradation on the quality itself to which they have aspired. The eminence which is not enjoyed by a peaceful and unequivocal title is more painful than gratifying. And if

superiority be accident, the tenure is not certain from hour to hour.

But though labour will do great things for genius, it will not in an iota supply the place of genius; it cannot give acuteness to the senses, nor vividness to that internal receptacle which constitutes fancy: without these what is the power of combination, or the power of intellect, if it could give them, without materials? But as little can labour give these last; it may improve the quantum given.

But I suspect that there are no small portion of the mass of mankind who deem one person to have so little superiority in nature over another, or at least, that there is so little of superiority in what is called literary genius, that no superior respect or deference is, on this account, due to one above another. It may be asked, how the acknowledgment of superiority contributes to the happiness of an individual? It may as well be asked, how the gratification of any other innocent desire contributes to happiness? The answer is, because Provi-

dence has implanted this desire in us. To be thought and spoken well of, is justly an almost universal passion; nor can any one be indifferent to the ground on which this esteem is built; nor will it be denied that intellectual pre-eminence, so far as it is not inconsistent with virtue, is the highest.

I will not say that every one is happy in proportion to the fame he enjoys: with possession, the keenest pleasure soon evaporates. Fame, perhaps, does not bring with it something which the possessor thinks that it ought to bring; or the body languishes, necessities press, or the sorrows attendant on the social relations of life are overwhelming.

But on what true genius has fame come in his lifetime equal to his deserts? It is long before the genuine ore can be correctly and finally separated from the false; the public are fearful and hesitating before they put the last stamp, which is to render the work current to posterity; they suspect the living; they cannot feel sure that they have the mantle of the prophet, or the

real flame of the poet; they require innumerable ordeals, some of which are not very reasonable, and others are fallacious.

But there is a slow, unswerving, undaunted progress which will at last go far to attain the end;—a progress which requires too much patience and perseverance, and offers too distant a reward, to encourage light adventurers; which admits the aspirants to superiority, but by such imperceptible gradations, that it alarms no one's pride and provokes no opposition.

I think it probable, that here and there a great genius has existed, who has had no idea of the extent of his own fame prevailing at the time. I have suspected that this was the case both with *Gray* and *Cowper*. They lived retired, and even corresponded with very few. It seems to me that they had less than the common share of vanity; but *Gray* was very proud,—not so *Cowper*, who had a frank simplicity and *naïveté*, irresistibly attractive. They had both delightful moral dispositions, but as unlike as

they were in their intellect; and in this quality no two could be more unlike.

Could they then write, as they did, without being sensible of the fame which ought to have cheered them? Though they might not have been sensible of the extent of the cheer, still they heard a cheer, which, combined with the intrinsic pleasure of the occupation, was sufficient to urge them on. But nothing is more unfortunate to the energies of genius than to be either fearful or fastidious. Gray was both; and, therefore, he wrote very little. How grievous it is, that he thus let his mighty genius slumber:—

> ——"That one talent which is death to hide,
> Lodged with him useless."

The gloom of his spirits would have been greatly diminished, if not brushed away, had he been more busy and active; the clouds that were gathered into morbid vapours would have been broken, and have let in a permanent sunshine. But day followed day, and still he had only the same pretensions to

rest upon; he experienced nothing of that progression which keeps hope alive, and gives a freshness, without which interest cannot be kept up: for every thing loses its zest by prolonged familiarity; and we may even read Shakspeare and Milton uninterruptedly, till we become tired of them. Who then can continue to dwell with complacency on *the same* works of *his own?*

There is a sort of favourable self-estimate, which, if we lose, we lose our moral dignity,—and thence, a great preservative of our virtue.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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